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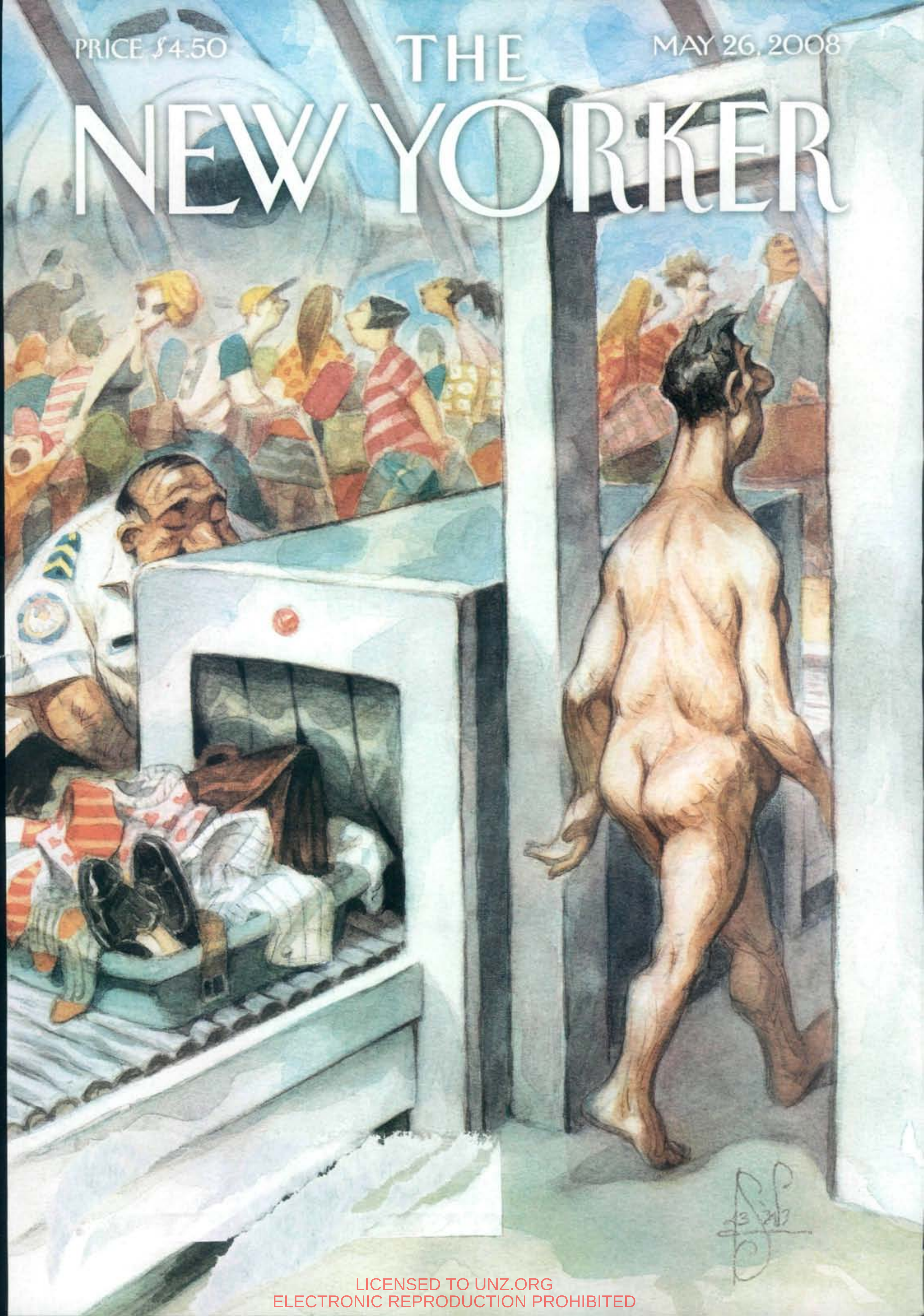

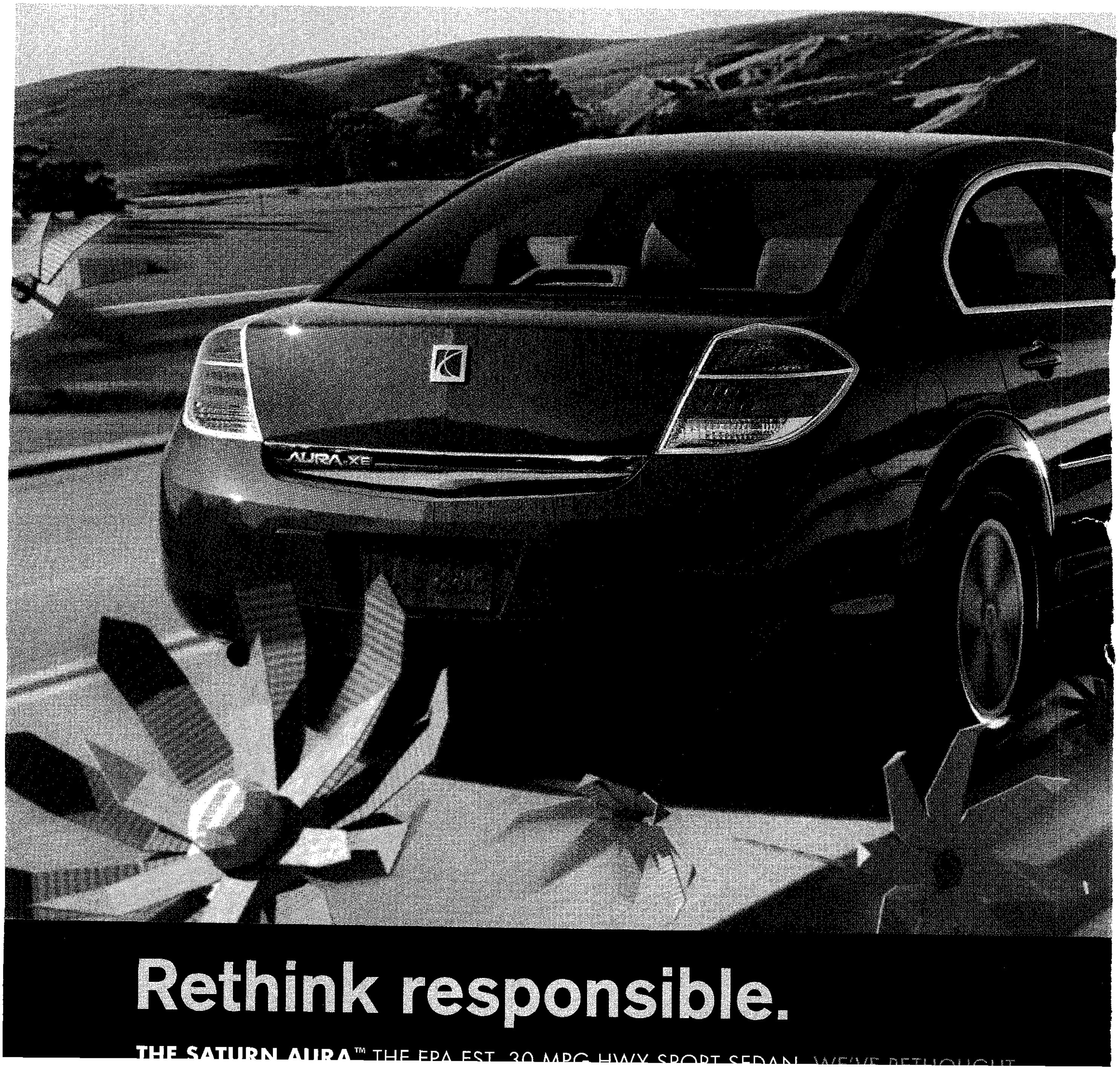

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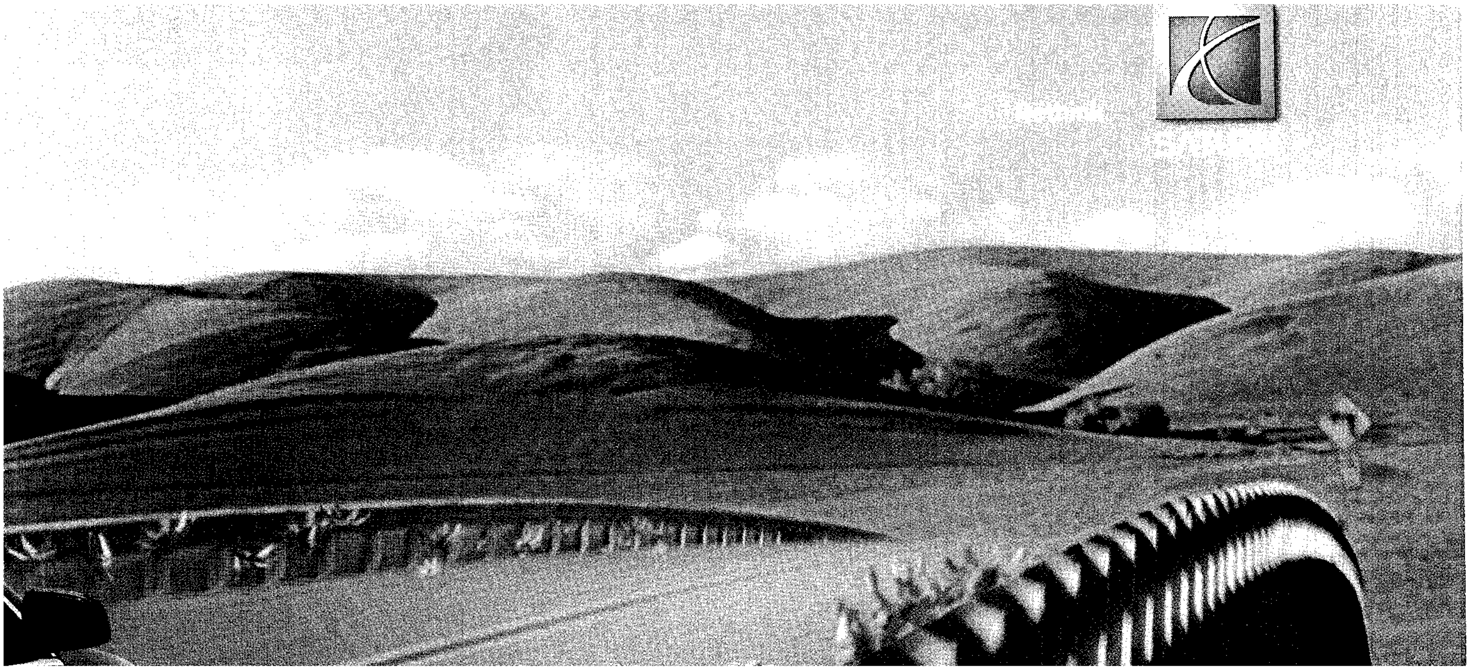

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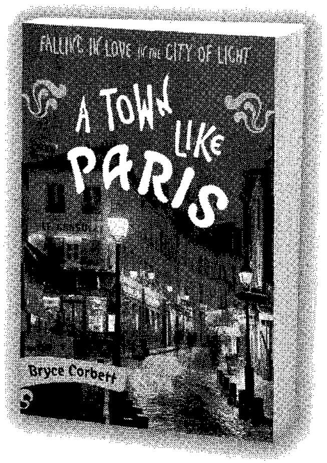

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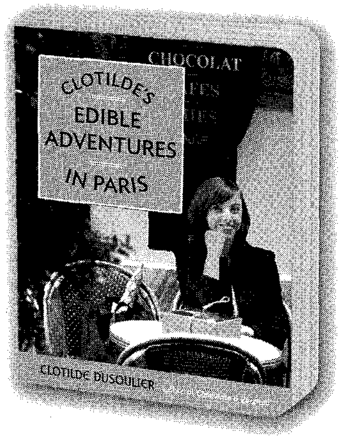

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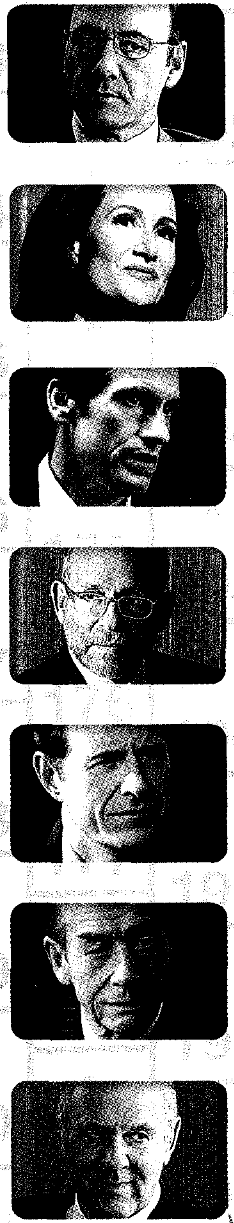

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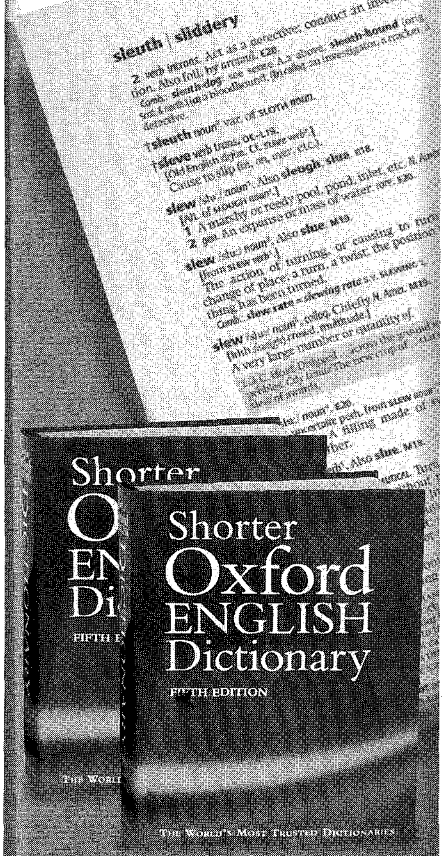

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Jeffrey Toobin (Comment, p. 25) is a staff writer. His book "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court" has received the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize.

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Peter de Sève (Cover) is the character designer for the movie "Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs," scheduled for release next year.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *George Packer* discusses conservatism and racism on the Campaign Trail podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. / *Ian Frazier* talks about writing and writers' workshops. / Video from The New Yorker Conference, "Stories from the Near Future." / The Naked Campaign videos, featuring *Steve Brodner*. / The Book Bench, a new literary blog, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Sasha Frere-Jones*, and the editors of Goings On About Town. / From the archives: *Berton Roueché* on hangovers, *Tad Friend* on Katie Couric, and thousands of movie reviews. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

THE MAIL

GOING UP

Transportation technologies determine the paths of our lives: elevators, which draw us together in densely populated cities, require a little more etiquette but amply reward us with efficiency, convenience, a much smaller carbon footprint, and the seeming magic of serendipitous encounters ("Up and Then Down," by Nick Paumgarten, April 21st). Cars spread us out and isolate us, encourage rudeness, destroy the beauty of our landscapes and the health of our environment, and kill us with shocking frequency. And yet Americans love their cars, and feel annoyed and fearful about elevators. Reading Paumgarten's piece, one might think that negative feelings about elevators were basically hardwired in human biology, but our feelings about different modes of travel are strongly conditioned by our culture. Though I and other aficionados of vertical transport could provide Paumgarten with a long list of elevator art, he is right that, relative to trains, planes, and automobiles, elevators have been ignored or abused by popular culture, despite the fact that those machines, whatever their benefits, also destroy lives, communities, and planet Earth. The fault lies with artists and with the elevator industry itself, which has for a century and a half encouraged fear by focussing its marketing relentlessly on the question of safety, and with narratives that focus on rare exceptions of accidents and mechanical failures, like Nicholas White's experience of getting stuck.

Daniel Levinson Wilk
New York City

Paumgarten writes, "While anthems have been written to jet travel, locomotives, and the lure of the open road, the poetry of vertical transportation is scant. What is there to say, besides that it goes up and down?" Well, there is at least this to say: In a musical, "Thursdays Till Nine," written by Norman Franklin and me in 1947 for the Department Store Employees Union, the store's elevator operator (R. H. Maybe) sings "I'm the Skipper of a Shoebox on a String," in which she complains:

> Some day I'll skip a floor and I'll be canned,
> Already I can hear their reprimand:
> "We never expected our chariot
> To be run by a Judas Iscariot.
> Take your hand from those motors,
> You know where your coat is—
> Never darken our Otis again!"

Henry Foner
Brooklyn, N.Y.

FATE AND HISTORY

Daniel Mendelsohn encourages us to learn the political lessons of Herodotus' history of the Persian Wars (Books, April 28th). Yet Herodotus himself would see little point in such an exhortation, since underlying his Histories is a belief that nations and their leaders are steered by destiny, which is both inevitable and inscrutable. Gyges glimpses his queen naked, and, like a butterfly whose wing flaps cause a hurricane, generations later this transgression brings about the fall of the Lydian empire. Even Xerxes' disastrous decision to invade Greece was not entirely his own; according to Herodotus, he is practically bullied into it by an apparition in a dream. Herodotus' work describes human beings not as political animals but as prisoners of their nature and their place in history. At the heart of this encyclopedic narrative is the notion that no amount of accumulated knowledge can make our destiny any less inexorable. Herodotus put it best when he wrote of an unnamed Persian soldier who, after foretelling his army's destruction, laments, "This is the bitterest pain to human beings, to know much and control nothing."

Igor Gorodezky
Raleigh, N.C.

•

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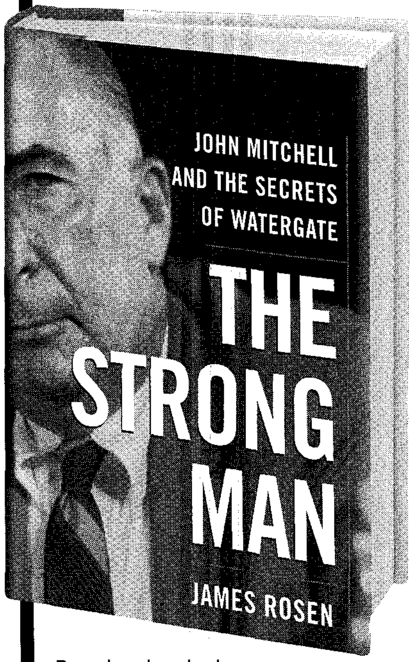

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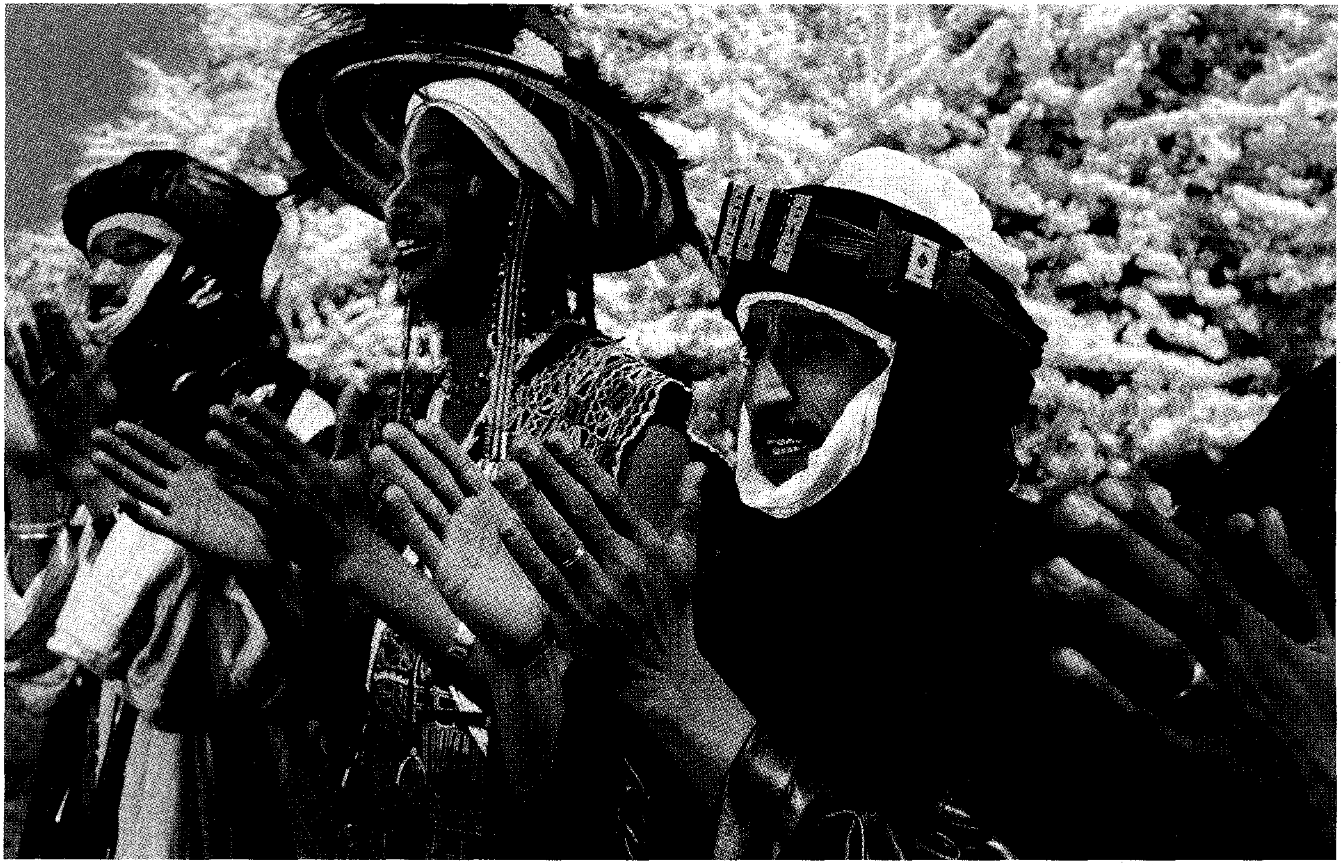

The group Etran Finatawa, from Niger. Photograph by Brian Finke.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
HEAVEN AND EARTH

Shakespeare in the Park opens with "Hamlet," staged by the Public Theatre's artistic director, Oskar Eustis. The cast includes Michael Stuhlbarg, as Hamlet; Sam Waterston, as Polonius; Lauren Ambrose, as Ophelia; and Margaret Colin, as Gertrude. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
DAWG HOUSE

For the past four decades, the mandolin virtuoso David Grisman, who has played with everyone from Stéphane Grappelli to Jerry Garcia, has been crafting "dawg" music, a wild mixture of swing, bluegrass, Latin, jazz, and Gypsy influences. He's also adept at traditional bluegrass in the Bill Monroe vein, and that's what he and his band will serve up at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill. (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SPLIT PERSONALITY

The flamboyant composer-pianist David Del Tredici is at once an old-school Lisztian virtuoso and a musical-sexual provocateur. He takes command of the Bargemusic series this weekend in a program that features his song cycle "Love Addiction." (See page 18.)

MOVIES
REACH FOR THE SKY

IFC Center kicks off a monthlong midnight series of science-fiction films from the nineteen-seventies with screenings of Ridley Scott's "Alien." David Lynch's "Eraserhead," the Mel Gibson vehicle "Mad Max," John Boorman's utopia-gone-wrong drama "Zardoz," the television movie "Battlestar Galactica," and Woody Allen's "Sleeper" will follow. (See page 21.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
BRING THE KIDS

The Guggenheim's Learning Through Art program allows public elementary-school students to work with established artists. The fruits of the kids' efforts are on display at the museum's exhibit "A Year with Children." Spring Family Day, which coincides with the show this week, features storytelling, artmaking, and other activities for the short-attention-span set. (See page 22.)

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SHOOT TO THRILL

The Whitney's show of nearly a hundred Polaroids by Robert Mapplethorpe includes some of the artist's best work, much of it on exhibit for the first time. Taken between 1970 and 1975, when Mapplethorpe was in his twenties, these little pictures anticipate virtually all of his signature subjects: sex, beauty, celebrity, fetishism, elegance. They're the work of a photographer testing his eye, yet there's nothing tentative and nothing tossed off. Because the Polaroid encourages spontaneity and a certain amount of self-indulgence, many of Mapplethorpe's most revealing images are of himself and close friends, including his constant companion Patti Smith and his mentor/lover Sam Wagstaff. Aside from a few double exposures, however, his experimentation is largely a matter of exploring his range—from portraiture to still-life—and refining his style, which never strayed far from classic modernism. The sophistication of this style is apparent early on, and, whether his subject is Marianne Faithfull or a tangle of bondage gear, it's at its most intimate and seductive here.

"UNTITLED (NICHOLAS BLACK, LONDON)" (1973) / ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE FOUNDATION

—*Vince Aletti*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ARTEFACTS
The "Brits Off Broadway" festival continues with Mike Bartlett's drama about a sixteen-year-old girl who finds out that her father, whom she's never met, stole an antique from the National Museum in Baghdad. James Grieve directs. In previews. Opens May 25. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BITTER HONEY
Eric Bogosian reads monologues that have rarely or never been performed, presented by the LAByrinth Theatre Company. May 21-22. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-513-1012.)

BLINK
A drama by Ian Rowlands, about child abuse at a school in Wales, is part of the "Brits Off Broadway" festival. Stephen Fisher directs. In previews. Opens May 25. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE COCKTAIL HOUR
Theater Breaking Through Barriers presents A. R. Gurney's comedy, about a young man who asks his parents' permission to produce a play about them. Ike Schambelan directs. Previews begin May 24. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

EDWARD ALBEE'S OCCUPANT
Signature Theatre Company presents Edward Albee's 2002 work about the sculptor Louise Nevelson, starring Mercedes Ruehl and Larry Bryggman. Pam MacKinnon directs. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

THE GREAT AMERICAN ALL-STAR TRAVELING WAR MACHINE
Irondale Ensemble Project presents a cabaret of songs, monologues, and sketches on the theme of war, derived from Lewis Lapham's "States of War." Jim Niesen directs. In previews. Opens May 22. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

HAMLET
Shakespeare in the Park opens with the tragedy, staged by Oskar Eustis (the artistic director of the Public) and starring Michael Stuhlbarg, Lauren Ambrose, and Sam Waterston. Previews begin May 27. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

JOLLYSHIP THE WHIZ-BANG
Nick Jones wrote the book and lyrics for this pirate-puppet theatrical rock show by the troupe of the same name. Sam Gold directs. In previews. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

LEN, ASLEEP IN VINYL
Second Stage's Uptown Series begins with a dark comedy by Carly Mensch, about a music producer who reunites with his estranged son. Jackson Gay directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

PORT AUTHORITY
The New York première of a play by Conor McPherson ("The Seafarer"), about three generations of Irishmen in modern-day Dublin. Opens May 21. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

PRISONER OF THE CROWN
The Irish Rep presents Richard F. Stockton's drama about Sir Roger Casement, an Irish patriot who was convicted of treason in 1916. Ciarán O'Reilly directs. In previews. Opens May 22. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

REASONS TO BE PRETTY
The world première of a comic drama by Neil LaBute, in which a man's comments about a co-worker's beauty get back to his wife. Piper Perabo, Alison Pill, Thomas Sadoski, and Pablo Schreiber star. Terry Kinney directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SAVED
The world première of a new musical based on the 2004 film, about various imbroglios at a Christian high school. With music and lyrics by Michael Friedman and a book and lyrics by John Dempsey and Rinne Groff. Gary Griffin directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

BOEING-BOEING
In Marc Camoletti's sex farce from 1961, Bernard (Bradley Whitford) is a high-living libertine engaged to three different stewardesses—an American (Kathryn Hahn), an Italian (Gina Gershon), and a German (Mary McCormack). If farces need to run like clockwork, Camoletti's has more than a few loose pinions. But Matthew Warchus's revival, awash in kitschy mod colors, has enough fizzy ingredients to make up for the script's weak spots. Chief among them is a cast that appears to be having a terrific time, led by the dazzling Mark Rylance, as Robert, Bernard's wimpy friend from Wisconsin, who gets caught up in the act. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COUNTRY GIRL
Clifford Odets's play from 1950, about an alcoholic actor trying to stage a comeback (under the masterly direction of Mike Nichols), offers a portrait of a complex, symbiotic marriage. In a brilliant bit of casting, Frank Elgin is played by Morgan Freeman, and his wife, Georgie, by Frances McDormand. McDormand is a subtle player; in her hands, Georgie's fatigue feels ancient, the product of a lifetime of ritually appeasing Frank's corrosive insecurity and of tamping down her own rage. Freeman has a laid-back inscrutability that works well for his slippery, self-destructive character. He's hard to read, which makes him both compelling and commanding. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/12/08.) (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DAMASCUS
David Greig's comic drama, part of the "Brits Off Broadway" festival at 59E59, is a classic Middle East-meets-West story: gangly, well-meaning Paul (Ewen Bremner, from "Trainspotting"), a naïve Scot, struggles to get by without offending anyone while on a business trip to Damascus, where he's selling English-instruction materials to the Syrian education ministry. When violence in Beirut disrupts his travel plans, he stays an extra day and begins to forge close connections to Muna (Nathalie Armin), a ministry representative, and Zakaria (Khalid Laith), a hotel clerk who dreams of Hollywood. Greig's script ably evokes the cultural tensions that underlie the characters' seemingly noble impulses. Language is portrayed as both a burden and a gift: a funny, wrenching scene in which Paul tries to apologize for the Iraq war in rudimentary French somehow seems to implicate us all. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE ECCENTRICITIES OF A NIGHTINGALE
Tennessee Williams's 1951 revision of "Summer and Smoke" hasn't been seen in New York for more than thirty years, and this superb revival could leave one wondering why. Alma Winemiller, an unwed minister's daughter who falls into a fateful, messy love with the town doctor's son, remains one of his most affecting and carefully drawn heroines, and is portrayed here with ingenious subtlety by Mary Bacon, who, along with the other topnotch performers in the cast, might as well be teaching a master class on Williams. Whereas a lesser director might have turned this drama into a parade of purple-tongued Southern Gothics, Jenn Thompson has found the play's subjects—suffering and loneliness—and brought them forth with an unerring, moving grace. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through May 24.)

LA FEMME EST MORTE
The Shalimar presents Shoshona Currier's interpretation of the Phaedra myth, which incorporates quotes from politicians and celebrities. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through May 24.)

GOOD BOYS AND TRUE
The New York première of a new play by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa ("Based on a Totally True Story"), set in the eighties, which revolves around a prep-school scandal. Scott Ellis directs. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

HOW THEATER FAILED AMERICA
The monologuist Mike Daisey deconstructs the world of artistic directors, development campaigns, and dwindling audiences in this bracing polemic-cum-memoir, which gives his chosen art form a little tough love. The corporatization of regional theatre, he convincingly suggests, is emblematic of the everything-as-commodity culture of America at large. In the course of his arguments, Daisey interjects backward glances at his own life in the theatre—wacky drama teachers, avant-garde disasters. His transfixing delivery (deskbound, perspiratory) only underscores his central point: theatre is a wave, not a particle, and the current system isn't doing it—or us—justice. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

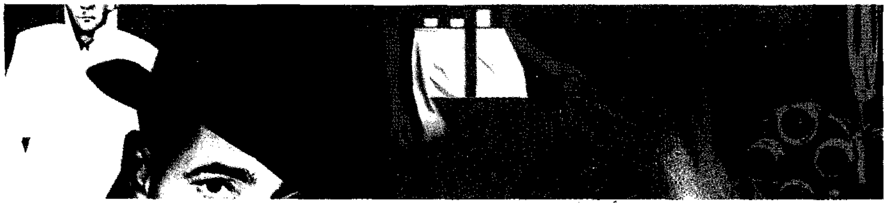
JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART
The actor muses on the art of storytelling and reads P. G. Wodehouse's "Uncle Fred Flits By." Jack O'Brien directs. Sundays and Mondays only. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARATHON 2008
Ensemble Studio Theatre presents its annual festival of new one-act plays, including "The Great War," by Neil LaBute, directed by Andrew McCarthy; "Okay," by Taylor Mac; and "October/November," by Anne Washburn. (549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

OLD COMEDY AFTER ARISTOPHANES' FROGS
David Greenspan gives Aristophanes' comedy a twenty-first-century overhaul in this Target Margin production, funnelling jokes about etymology, flatulence, and Dick Cheney into a manic, xylophone-accompanied vaudeville. In the play, Dionysus (the appealing Pedro Pascal) and his slave, Xanthias (Derek Lucci), travel to the underworld to find a bard who can heal the crumbling republic (Athens, that is—though there's no mistaking which other republic Greenspan has in mind), culminating in a poetry slam between Aeschylus and Euripides. Greenspan throws in Gertrude Stein, Tennessee Williams, and James Joyce, along with dance breaks, Iraq references, and, quite literally, a kitchen sink. The director, David Herskovits, moves the action along at a diverting clip, but the grafting of topical humor onto rhyming verse is more often awkward than it is illuminating. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

THE SOUND AND THE FURY
Elevator Repair Service ("Gatz") interprets the first chapter of William Faulkner's novel. (Reviewed in this issue.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

TOP GIRLS
In the first (and best) act of Caryl Churchill's daring and difficult play from 1982 (under the direction of James Macdonald), Marlene (Elizabeth Marvel), a diehard Thatcherite, throws an imaginary dinner party to congratulate herself on having been appointed managing director of a female employment agency. The guests include Pope Joan (the impressive Martha Plimpton), the Victorian traveller Isabella Bird (Marisa Tomei), and Dull Gret, of the Bruegel painting (the droll Ana Reeder). Like almost all the guests, Marlene has had to give up a child—a lost soul called Angie (also played by Plimpton), now a teen-ager, who has been reared by Marlene's working-class sister, Joyce (also played by Tomei). Marlene's success, we come to understand, has been won at the expense of others. The de-rigueur face-off between Marlene and her sister, however, is weakened for the audience by Tomei's miserable accent. Nonetheless, the meaning if not the music of Churchill's play comes through. (5/19/08) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)



DVD NOTES
NIGHTMARE ALLEY

Woody Allen had the misfortune to see his drama **"Cassandra's Dream"** (Genius Products) released soon after Sidney Lumet's "Before the Devil Knows You're Dead." In both movies, two brothers turn to crime as a way out of financial trouble. Lumet's vulgarly histrionic film, its story chopped up into a pseudo-hip jumble of time frames but ultimately reduced to a petty tale of simmering resentments, blew Allen's tight-lipped and straightforward narrative away at the box office, as well as in most critical estimations. But Allen's film is the far darker and stranger experience, its failure a reflection of the writer-director's greater audacity.

Set in contemporary London, and without an on-screen role for Allen himself, "Cassandra's Dream" follows the tone and the mood of his 2005 thriller, "Match Point," but carries its bare-bones storytelling to an even starker extreme. The framework for all his films, comedies as well as dramas, has always been the skit, fleshed out with urban folklore. But Allen seems to care as little for the mores of London as Shakespeare did for those of Denmark. The relentlessly bleak plot is stripped of any element that could distract from Allen's singular purpose: to depict human life as cruel, grim, and doomed.

Colin Farrell (who has never been better) and Ewan McGregor star as Terry and Ian, brothers who have big dreams and narrow prospects. Terry, a rough-hewn introvert, works in a high-end garage, dreams of opening a sporting-goods store, and gets his pocket money and his thrills from gambling. The glad-handing Ian, who dreams of a career as a wheeler-dealer in property development, helps his father manage a failing restaurant and impatiently awaits his chance to escape. Terry's heavy debts to a loan shark and Ian's expensive new liaison with a sleek young actress (Hayley Atwell) send them rushing for help to their rich uncle Howard (Tom Wilkinson), whose conditions bring on the swift, relentless tragedy that the title promises.

The seventy-two-year-old Allen provides an old man's rueful, cold perspective, but he takes the point of view of a son rather than a father: every time someone says the word "family," the screws of constraint tighten a little more against the brothers. The pace of the film is fast, the twists sudden, the dialogue unadorned; a hopeless view of existence has rarely been offered so forthrightly, or so engagingly.

—Richard Brody

JOHN RITTER

"He's a cat hater."
- member report #11222

"Don't expect him to negotiate."
- member report #3462

"These employees love what they do and it shows."
- member report #6942

"Their mothers would be very proud."
- member report #13456

"They never showed up and never called..."
- member report #8765

"Received an apology from the owner and gift certificate to dinner."
- member report #8356

"...they were Johnny on the spot..."
- member report #7477

"I can't believe how great it looks and how inexpensive it was."
- member report #9273

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"No matter how odd the job is, they still do it."
- member report #10777

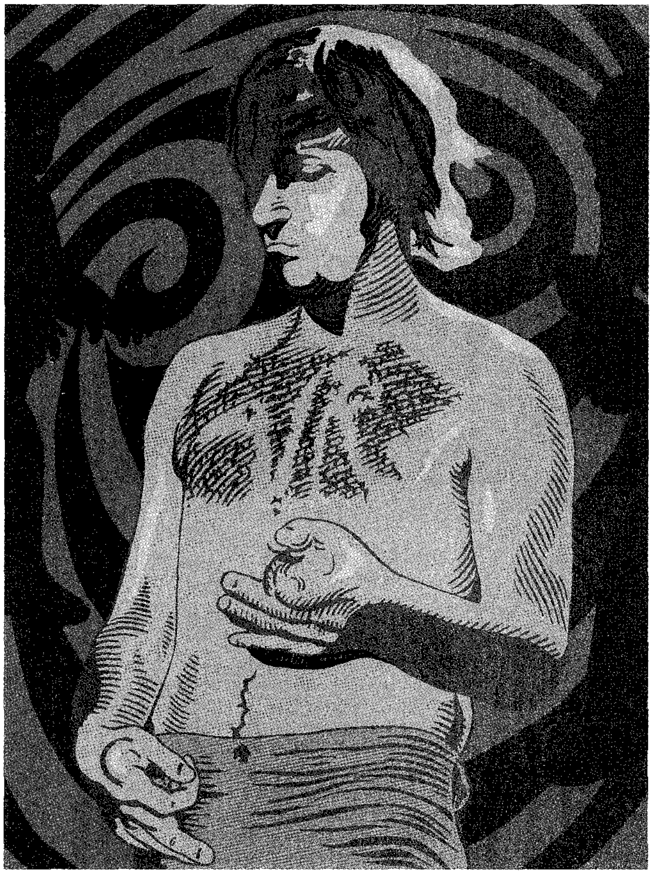
"I had to hire someone else to redo half the job."
- member report #10232

"Showroom is kid friendly."
- member report #7421

"My wife wanted him to stay for dinner."
- member report #17852

Also Playing

ADDING MACHINE: Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BETRAYED:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **A CATERED AFFAIR:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CRY-BABY:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-1400. **FROM UP HERE:** City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **GREASE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MACBETH:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through May 24. **THE NEW CENTURY:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **NOVEMBER:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **PASSING STRANGE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **RAFTA, RAFTA . . . :** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.



The noted air guitarist William Ocean, at the Knitting Factory.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS

376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—May 22: A solo performance by **Juan-Carlos Formell.** The Cuban guitarist, who is the son of Los Van Van's leader, Juan Formell, and the grandson of the legendary arranger Francisco Formell, is just back from New Orleans, where he recorded an album, "Johnny's Dream Club," named for a Havana cabaret where the jazz-infused ballads of the El Filin movement were performed, in the fifties. (See also the Blue Note, below.) May 24: The enchanting Dublin-born singer-songwriter **Susan McKeown.** She has all the musical grace that her homeland is noted for, and her head holds grand ideas—she's played with everyone from Natalie Merchant to the Klezmatics, and has ten albums to her credit.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 23: The **David Grisman Bluegrass Experience.** The adventurous bearded mandolinist Grisman is famous for pushing the envelope with his "dawg" music. (If you've ever listened to the NPR show "Car Talk," you've heard his music: the theme song is "Dawggy Mountain Breakdown.") His Bluegrass Experience band takes the music back to its roots.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 26: The erstwhile Brooklynite Tod A has returned from a self-imposed three-year exile. He's a changed man, and so is his current group, **Firewater;** the durable combo is now more of a multicultural force than ever. He wrote songs for the band's sixth album, "The Golden Hour," while travelling through India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Israel, and recorded them in those countries, using local musicians. The material crackles with exoticism, while keeping Tod A's wry insight and punky swagger. On tour, the band features musicians from France, Israel, England, and New York City, specifically Skeleton Key's Erik Sanko, on bass.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 24: Perhaps the preëminent punk band to emerge from California during the genre's early days, Los Angeles's **X** distinguished itself with feral rockabilly riffs (courtesy of the guitarist Billy Zoom) and skewed harmonies (thanks to the vocalist Exene Cervenka and the singer and bassist John Doe). The band, which is rounded out by the drummer DJ Bonebrake, embraced elements of folk, pop, and country, while the rest of the punk scene, by comparison, stuck with monochromatic monotony. X is one of the American underground's most beloved and influential acts, and the original lineup is back together for the band's thirty-first anniversary. With the Motor City garage group the **Detroit Cobras.** Led by the vocalist Rachel Nagy—a former butcher and stripper—and the guitarist Mary Ramirez, the Cobras soup up old soul and girl-group numbers with high-octane intensity.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—May 22: **Alice Smith,** a local singer with a four-octave range, favors ambitious and insightful R. & B. that has an earthy flair and a sensuous edge. The songs on her album, "For Lovers, Dreamers & Me," have the quirky appeal of early Erykah Badu. May 23: The **Brooklyn Funk Essentials,** who coalesced in the early nineties out of the slam-poetry and acid-jazz scenes, make music that encompasses more worldly elements than their name suggests. Their new album, "Watcha Playin'," was recorded in New York, Paris, Istanbul, and Stockholm.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 21: **Juliana Hatfield,** a fixture on the independent-pop scene for more than a decade, specializes in distinctly distaff songs that range from mopey to angry, and she bolsters her tales of angst and ennui with some fine guitar playing. Her forthcoming album, "How to Walk Away," features contributions from the vocalists Richard Butler, of the Psychedelic Furs, and Matthew Caws, of Nada Surf; the guitarist Jody Porter, from Fountains of Wayne; and the violinist Tracy Bonham. May 23: **Chicha Libre,** something of a local supergroup, includes the cuatro player and vocalist Olivier Conan (a member of Las Rubias del Norte and also one of the owners of the Brooklyn club Barbès), the keyboardist Joshua Camp (of One Ring Zero), the bassist Nicholas Cudahy (formerly of Combustible Edison), and the guitarist Vincent Douglas (of Bébé Eiffel, and another Barbès owner). They start with South American *chicha* music (an electrified take on the folkloric genre *cumbia* that dates back some thirty years) and add psychedelic touches, surf rock, and extended improvisations. With the Brooklyn ensemble **Les Sans Culottes,** whose raunchy faux-French rock is both a sendup of and a tribute to late-period Serge Gainsbourg and punchy yé-yé girl pop.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—While the country has been enthralled yet again by the naked ambition of the contestants on "American Idol," a much smaller local competition has captivated a sliver of the music-loving public—the search for the **Ultimate Air Band.** Organized by William Ocean, the 2007 U.S. Air Guitar Champion, the contest includes a collection of entertaining posers who have made it through auditions at area bars in the past few weeks. The effort culminates in a "full band" performance here on May 22.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—May 22: The stylish Cuban diva **Albita** moved to the States fifteen years ago, and since then she's attracted a following right out of "Entertainment Tonight." Madonna, Gianni Versace, Sylvester Stallone, and Gloria Estefan all caught her regular, mid-nineties shows at Centro Vasco, a restaurant in Miami. Despite the celebrity appeal, Albita's heart lies with the earthy Cuban roots music known as *son.*

SOUTHPAW

125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—May 24: **Firewater** (see the Bowery Ballroom).

TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—May 21-22: The virtuosic New York ensemble **Dream Theater** is prone to densely complicated solos that it delivers with the punch of heavy metal. The group is headlining the Progressive Nation tour, which also features **Opeth,** a death-metal band from Sweden, who augment their music with symphonic elements; North Carolina's ambitious hard-core band **Between the Buried and Me;** and **Three,** a like-minded young group out of Woodstock, New York.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through June 14: **Karen Akers.** "Move On," the new show by the doyenne of latter-day cabaret, explores the concept of personal change. Among the offerings are Stephen Sondheim's "The Glamorous Life," Cole Porter's "Down in the Depths," and Leiber and Stoller's "Ready to Begin Again."

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—**James Carter,** a dashing improviser who seemingly never met a reed instrument he couldn't tackle, has a new album, "Present Tense," which displays both his gruff lyricism and his charging style. He recorded it with a new septet and celebrates its release here May 21-24 with that group.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 20-25: **Steve Tyrell.** The jovial, husky-voiced singer pays tribute to his longtime associate Burt Bacharach, whose classic songs make up Tyrell's forthcoming release, "Back to Bacharach." May 26: The Cuban guitarist **Juan-Carlos Formell** is joined by many of the musicians who helped record his new album, "Johnny's Dream Club" (see Barbès, above). The band includes the pianist **Osmany Paredes,** the bassist **Pedro Giraudo,** the percussionist **Jorge Leyva,** and the trombonist and violinist **Lewis Kahn,** of the Fania All Stars. The New Orleans clarinettist Dr. Michael White also contributed to the album; the saxophonist **Yosvany Terry** replaces him here.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through May 31: **Marilyn McCoo** and her husband, **Billy Davis, Jr.,** former key members of the 5th Dimension as well as hit-makers on their own, bring their polished act uptown.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 20-25 and May 27-June 1: The **Bill Charlap** trio. Working in spruce synchronicity with the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington,** the pianist Charlap displays the poise and taste, and, increasingly, the depth, of such grand stylists as Hank Jones and the late Tommy Flanagan.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 22-25: A well-deserved tribute to the adventurous saxophonist Jackie McLean, whose death, in 2006, robbed jazz of an inspired improviser and inspiring educator. The first two nights bring together older associates of McLean's, including the trumpeter **Charles Tolliver,** the trombonist **Grachan Moncur,** and the bassist **Cecil McBee.** The final two nights feature younger acolytes, such as the vibraphonist **Steve Nelson,** the bassist **Nat Reeves,** and the trombonist **Steve Davis.** McLean's son, the saxophonist **Renè McLean,** and the poet **Amiri Baraka** will be on hand all week. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—May 23-24, in the Rose Theatre: The celebrated Brazilian composer and pianist **Ivan Lins** gets support from **Trio da Paz** and the a-cappella quartet **New York Voices.** May 23-24, in the Allen Room: Brazil's **Rosa Passos.** This enchanting, superbly musical, and distinctively understated singer is finally gaining the recognition here that she's long enjoyed in her homeland. Her new CD, a collection of Brazilian love songs, is titled "Romance."

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 20-21: **Fred Hersch,** an intense and probing pianist, has a new group that he's dubbed the Pocket Orchestra, featuring the trumpeter **Ralph Alessi,** the vocalist **Jo Lawry,** and the percussionist **Richie Barshay.** May 23-24: **Ignacio Berroa,** a seasoned drummer who blurs the lines between jazz swing and Afro-Cuban rhythms, leads his own quartet, drawing on his début album, "Codes," from 2006.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 20-25: The **Al Foster** quartet. Foster, an esteemed drummer, has brought rhythmic sparkle to the bands of Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Joe Henderson, among many others. Here, he's joined by the Israeli saxophonist **Eli Degibri,** the pianist **Gary Versace,** and the bassist **Doug Weiss.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Tiepolo Drawings from the Robert Lehman Collection."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Photography on Photography: Reflections on the Medium Since 1960."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Radiance from the Rain Forest: Featherwork in Ancient Peru."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Anatomy of a Masterpiece: How to Read Chinese Paintings."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** If leadership in installational art for the masses were an elected position, the Icelandic-Danish dab hand would be a shoo-in. Fresh from such triumphs as the weatherizing of the Tate Modern (huge artificial sun, mirrored ceiling, and fog in the Turbine Hall) and soon to author mechanical waterfalls in New York Harbor, Eliasson enchants with environments that deploy changing colors, falling or rising water (in an upside-down waterfall), odorous Arctic moss, and a dangling electric fan that transfixes museumgoers in the atrium with its overhead velleities. The show continues at P.S. 1, where photographs and studio works affirm the lyricism and integrity of Eliasson's creative character. He's someone for whom beauty is normal. Through June 30. ♦ **"Glossolalia: Languages of Drawing."** Through July 7. ♦ **"Projects 87: Sigalit Landau."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Geometry of Motion 1920s/1970s."** Through June 23. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe."** Through May 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

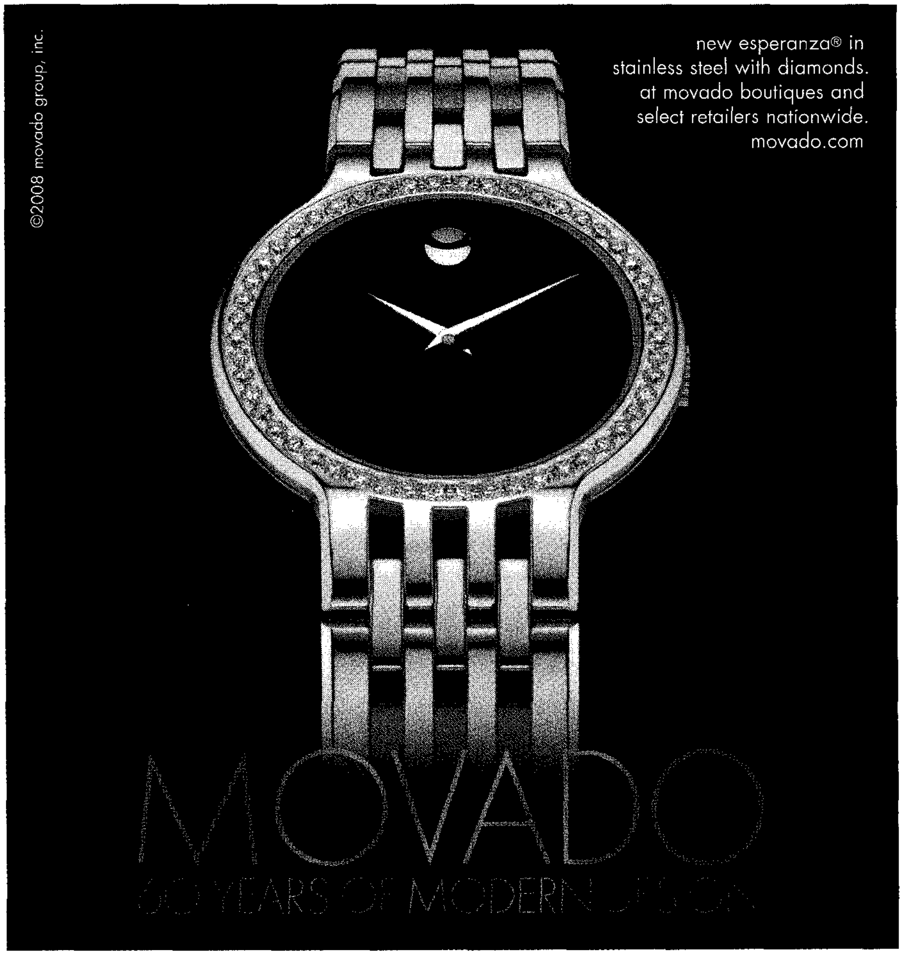
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"2008 Whitney Biennial."** Through June 1. ♦ **"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"© Murakami."** Through July 13. ♦ **"Utagawa: Masters of the Japanese Print."** Through June 15. ♦ **"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. ♦ Around five hundred specimens flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other flora. Through May 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Illuminating the Medieval Hunt."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)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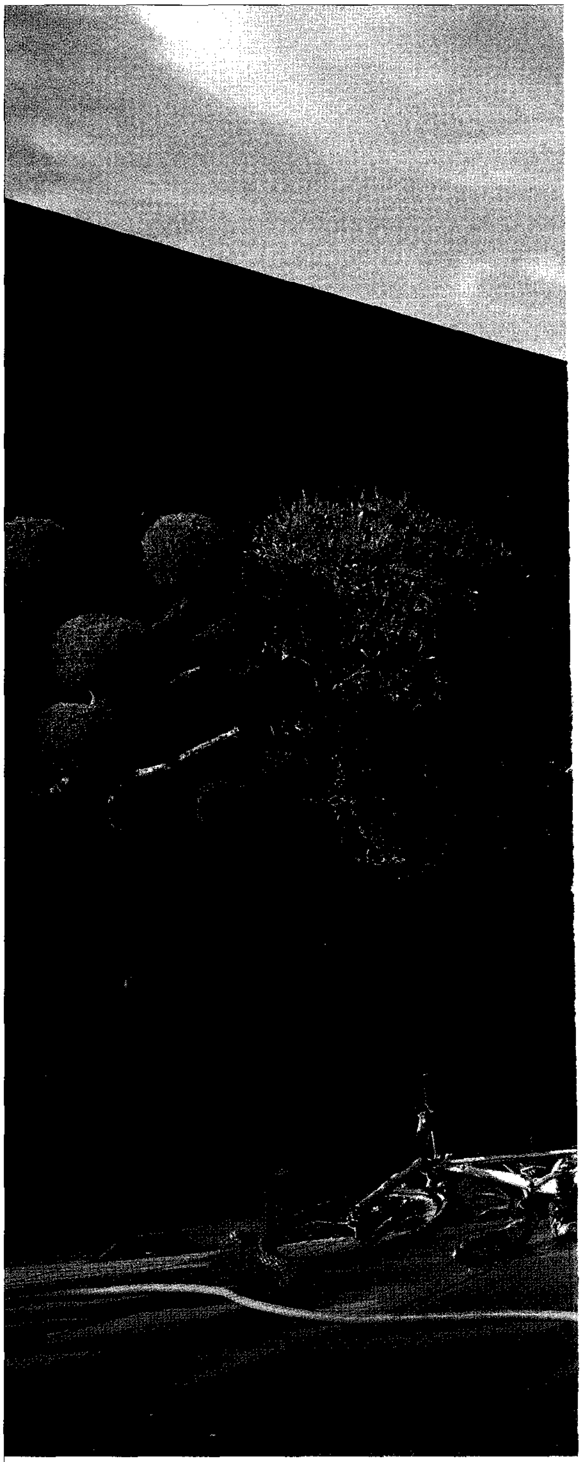
I always wanted flames.
But they're just not me.



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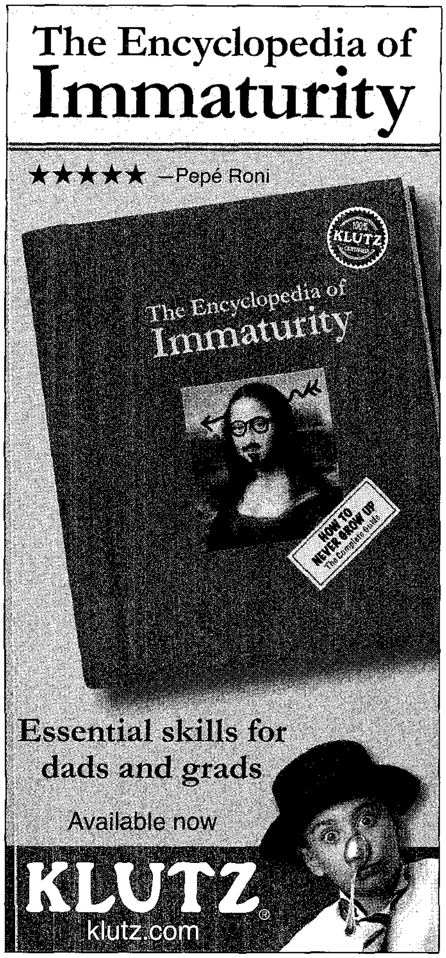
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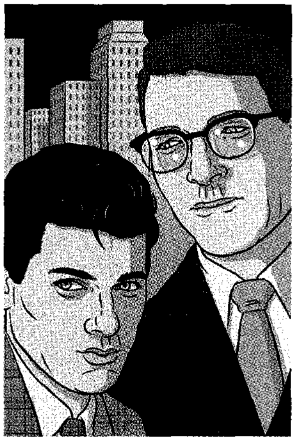
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CATCHING FLACKS

No film fits more neatly into MOMA's "Jazz Score" series than "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957), screening May 24 and May 25. The sounds range from the coolly restrained (the Chico Hamilton Quintet) to the dark and braying—brace yourself for Elmer Bernstein's opening theme. The music feeds the movie's larger noise: the fizz of street life after dark (many scenes were shot on location, within shouting distance of Times Square) and the lush patter of the dialogue, which seems overheated on the page, as Clifford Odets admitted when he wrote it with Ernest Lehman, but is somehow just right for the moral monsters onscreen. Burt Lancaster, wearing the scariest spectacles in the history of cinema (they appear before he does, on the side of a truck), plays the Broadway columnist J. J. Hunsecker, and Tony Curtis is a scurrying press agent, "the boy with the ice-cream face." This great New York riff was directed by a Scot, Alexander Mackendrick, and was greeted with trepidation on its release. No wonder: the quality of malice is not strained.



—*Anthony Lane*

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Paul Chan: The 7 ~~Lights~~."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Tomma Abts."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Double Album: Daniel Guzmán and Steven Shearer."** Through July 6. ♦ **"SANAA: Works 1998-2008."** Through June 15. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** Through June 30. ♦ **"WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution."** Through May 31. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Michael Portnoy: Casino Ilinx."** Through July 28. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—In 2001, the museum's emerging-artist survey "Freestyle" introduced the concept of "post-black"—the condition of young American artists of color in the post-minimal, post-Pop, post-identity-politics landscape. Now **"Flow"** showcases twenty artists, most under the age of forty, born in Africa or to African parents and working worldwide. The show's spectrum ranges from documentary (Nontsikelelo (Lolo) Veleko's photographs of stylish Johannesburg teen-agers) to abstraction (Olalekan Jeyifous's quasi-modernist architectural sculptures). But video, painting, drawing, and installation feature, too. There is no unifying theme—unless one notes that the figure, when it appears, tends to be brown-skinned. That is, "Flow" looks like any other well-produced international survey, which may be the point. Through June 29. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

AMY BESSONE
To call Bessone's paintings figurative isn't entirely accurate. Rather, her subjects are figurines. Bessone's two-venue New York début presents a theatrical cast of characters—a eunuch, who looks like a washed-up silent-movie star, with a turban, a pencil mustache, and ghoulish eye makeup; a Faustian character with a wicked widow's peak; a raccoon—based on porcelain or metal statuettes. The kitsch factor is so high that it threatens to undermine the visual pleasures. Through May 23. (Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212; Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400.)

PIZZI CANNELLA
In his first Stateside show in fifteen years, the Italian artist looks at the big picture. For the paintings in "Earth, Sky and Sea," Cannella takes maps of the world and superimposes onto them the light of a new moon or an atmospheric haze. He has drained his subject of conflict—the works are loosely inspired by the maps broadcast on CNN during the Gulf War—by erasing the national borders. Cathedrals planted on amorphous-looking continents in one painting take the work in a strangely ecclesiastical direction, but, by and large, Cannella seems bent on a one-world, one-love approach. Through May 30. (Mathes, 22 E. 80th St. 212-570-4190.)

KEITH HARING
Haring, who died in 1990, at the age of thirty-one, lingers in the imagination as an impish party kid in round-rimmed glasses, the king of graffiti-derived barking dogs, dancing figures, and wiggly penises. All are accounted for in this small retrospective, which marks his fiftieth birthday. Of the fourteen paintings, drawings, and painted objects from the eighties, the simple images are the best—a pig-nosed, three-eyed cartoon face in pink and black enamel on metal; a chalked-over poster of a *Penthouse* cover featuring Pia Zadora wearing an American flag and a smile; a black-and-red enamel-and-ink triptych of a figure either jumping for joy or being electrocuted. Through June 28. (Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.)

MICHAEL WELDON

SAUL LEITER
The Leiter revival continues with a shrewdly edited exhibition devoted to his photographs of women. A few are from his years at *Harper's Bazaar*, in the late fifties and sixties, but many more were made before that, often on the street, sometimes in bed. The work is about the pleasure of looking, even (or especially) when the subject of the gaze is unaware of it; many of Leiter's women are glimpsed in passing. Others are seen up close and in private moments, but the camera is never predatory—it's conspiratorial, and the eroticism is less about momentary excitement than about genuine satisfaction. Through June 21. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

WAYNE THIEBAUD
The copiously iced cakes in Thiebaud's signature paintings project a curious kind of personality, so it follows that, when he portrays a human sitter, the person jells like a chilled dessert. In "Girl with Blue Shoes," the subject sits sidesaddle on a straight-backed chair, wearing sandals, a matching hair band, and a candy-striped shift; the creamy background is modulated only by a flat blue shadow, and it's impossible to divine the girl's mood. The oil canvases and the fluent pencil drawings range in date from 1963 to 1992, but their style is pleasingly consistent. Through May 30. (Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 212-987-4997.)

Short List

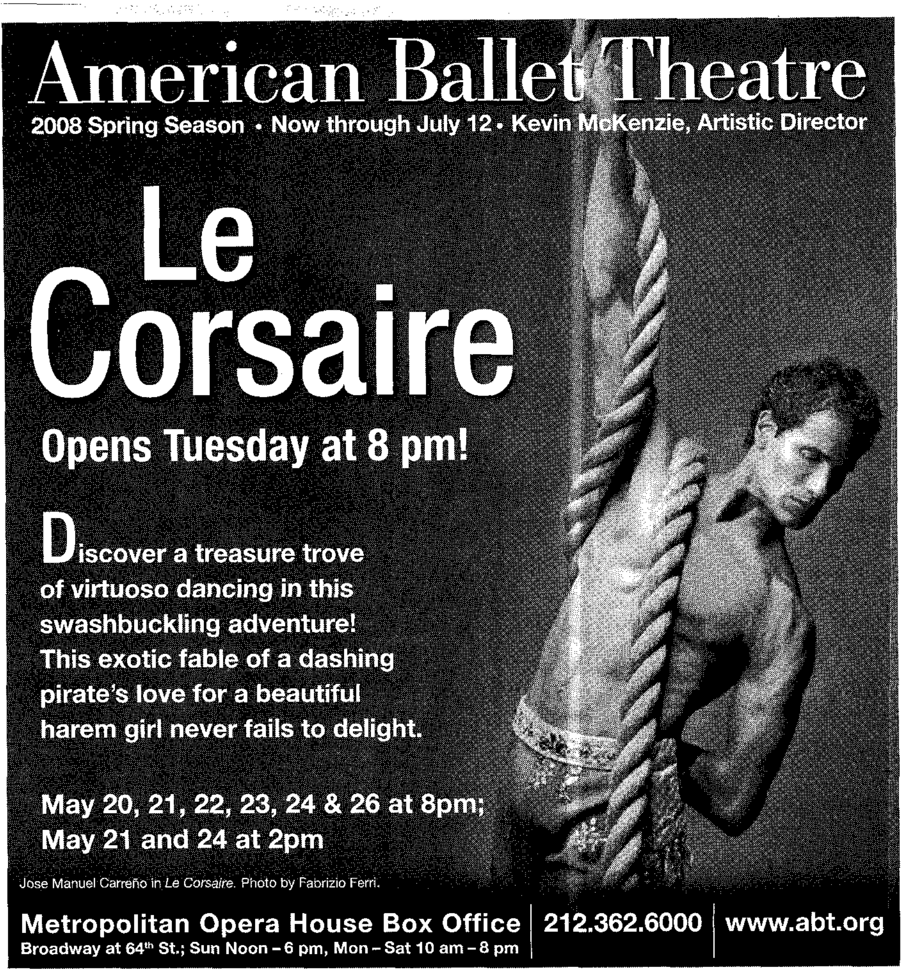
NOBUYOSHI ARAKI: 1018 Art, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 212-537-0453. Through July 25. **JAKE & DINOS CHAPMAN:** C & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through June 14. **ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER:** Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through June 14. **GABRIEL OROZCO:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 14. **JEANNE SILVERTHORNE:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through June 13.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

AZIZ + CUCHER
The collaborative team returns to photography with a series of large-scale landscapes whose Impressionist aura is the result of digital reworking. Images of trees, waves, and fields of flowers are saved from prettiness by the sense that they've been eaten away from within. Nothing is solid; everything is permeable, lacy, almost transparent. Because the works are printed on metallic paper, there's an oily, organic sheen to the dark spaces, but the eye penetrates the surface at so many points that it seems possible to sink right into or pass through it. Monet meets the pixilated screen, and the world dissolves into gorgeous atoms. Through June 7. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

RUDOLF DE CRIGNIS
The art world lost a quiet light when de Crignis died, in December, 2006. His first posthumous solo show of paintings, made between 1992 and 2006, traces de Crignis's development into a supreme colorist. What appear to be simple monochrome canvases are actually built up from dozens of layers of translucent pigment. Displayed in natural light, the works are exercises in slow looking, unfolding as one views them from different vantage points (as de Crignis prescribed). If art is about opening up possibilities, about asking questions rather than providing answers, paintings like these, which throw into flux such basic designations as "blue," "gray," and "green," are beacons. Through June 14. (Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055.)

DINH Q. LÊ
Since we can only imagine the conditions at Guantánamo Bay, Lê brings us inside earlier detention camps in Southeast Asia. A political prison in Vietnam (Lê's birthplace), built by the French and later used by the U.S., is the subject of a four-channel video that slowly pans through crumbling, abandoned cells. Much more effective are the big, in-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Jose Manuel Carreño in *Le Corsaire*. Photo by Fabrizio Ferri.
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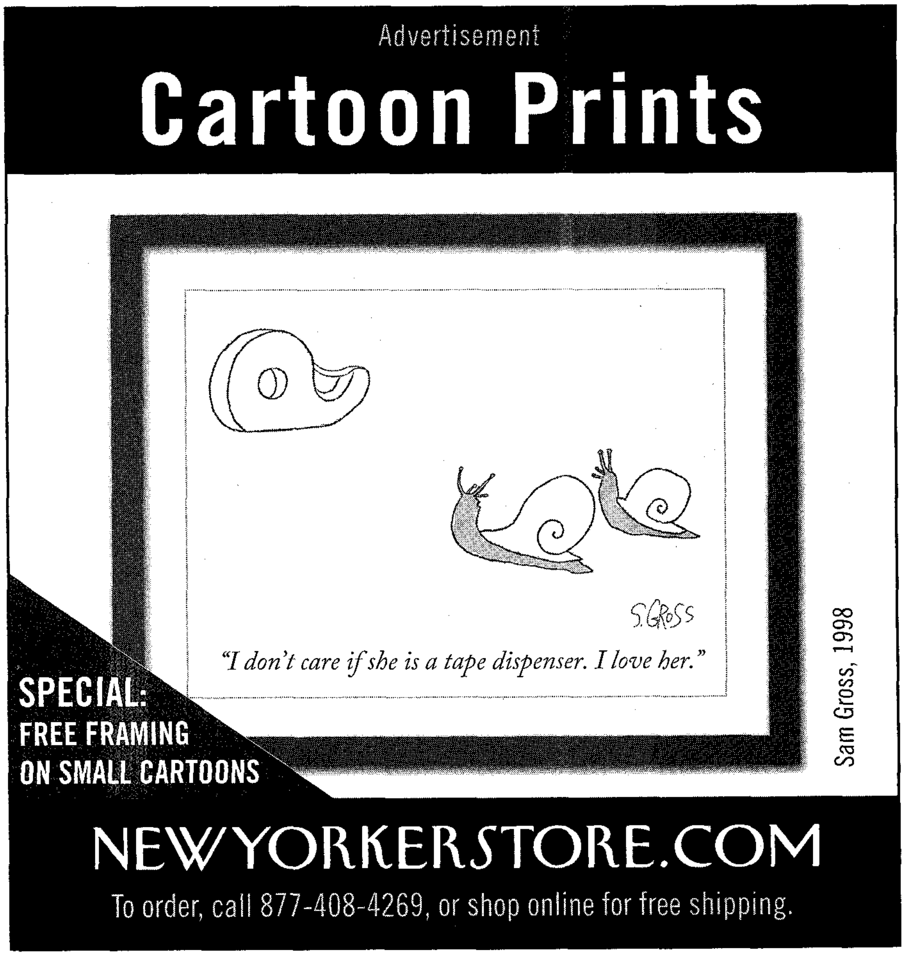
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The photograph "Cypress Hill Cemetery, 1986," by Sylvia Plachy, at Umbrage.

tricately woven photographs that are his trademark, here incorporating images taken in Tuol Sleng, the notorious high school turned Khmer Rouge prison, which is now a genocide museum. Lê interlaces black-and-white portraits of men and women who died in the prison with images of its now scrubbed interiors, so that the horrific past seeps into the placid present. Through May 31. (P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

GEDI SIBONY

An alchemist of the everyday, Sibony makes stripped-down sculptures that may test the limits of your faith in art, but they'll also renew it. "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees," the French poet Paul Valéry wrote, and in Sibony's work—congeries of carpet, Masonite, cardboard, hollow-core doors, garbage bags, tape—the stuff of a Home Depot shopping list assumes ineffable grace. The down-and-dirty game of Arte Povera and the gnostic wit of Rachel Harrison are branches of the same sculptural tree, but Sibony is out on a limb of his own. Through May 24. (Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

Short List

MATTHEW BRANNON: Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Opens May 22. **WALTON FORD:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through July 3. **LIAM GILLICK:** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through June 14. **ANISH KAPOOR:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through June 21. **LOUISE LAWLER:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through June 7. **NEO RAUCH:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through June 21. **TOM SACHS:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through June 21. **DAVID SHRIGLEY:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through June 21. **LAURIE SIMMONS:** Nitsch, 534 W. 22nd St. 212-645-2030. Through June 28. **ROBERT THERRIEN:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 14. **CHRISTOPHER WOOL:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through June 21. **"WHO'S AFRAID OF JASPER JOHNS?":** Shafrazi, 544 W. 26th St. 212-274-9300. Through July 12.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN AND BROOKLYN

KATHERINE BERNHARDT

What if a German Expressionist like Emil Nolde had cribbed his subjects from *People*? The results might resemble Bernhardt's portraits of such tabloid mainstays as Gisele Bündchen and Kanye West. Worshippers at the altar of pop culture might be as put off by Bernhardt's depictions as some Christians were by Nolde's images of Christ; she paints the icons as if they were disintegrating in a maelstrom of brushstrokes and drips of vivid color. If it seems problematic that Bernhardt's is essentially a recycled aesthetic, one could say the same of the early Expressionists. Through June 1. (Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631.)

Short List

JOHN BALDESSARI/MATT MULLICAN: Williams, 313 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757. Through June 28. **STEVE DIBENEDETTO:** Nolan, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-6190. Through June 21. **SYLVIA PLACHY:** Umbrage, 111 Front St., Brooklyn. 212-796-2707. Through June 28. **VALESKA SOARES:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through May 25. **"NEW YORK COOL":** Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through July 19.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The fifth program of the Jerome Robbins celebration, "Baroque to Jazz," opens with the masterly "Brandenburg," one of the choreographer's last, and most consistently pleasurable, ballets, from 1997. The program also includes two of his best-loved ballets—"In the Night," a series of alternately tender, playful, and turbulent pas de deux inspired by the music of Chopin, and the jazzy period piece "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." The latter work has been ardently adopted by the company's younger dancers, who come alive in its finger-snapping, aggressively blank-faced, sneaker-clad choreography, with more than a slight echo of "West Side Story." Another program, "All-American Fare," features the spunky "Interplay," Robbins's second ballet (from 1945). ♦ May 20 at 7:30 and May 22 at 8: "Double Feature." ♦ May 21 at 7:30 and May 24 at 8: "Brandenburg," "In the Night," and "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." ♦ May 23 at 8: "An American in Paris," "Valse Triste," "The Chairman Dances," "Bugaku," and "Russian Seasons." ♦ May 24 at 2: "Mother Goose," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Antique Epigraphs," and "In G Major." ♦ May 25 at 3: "Jewels." ♦ May 27 at 7:30: "Interplay," "Ives, Songs," and "I'm Old Fashioned." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 29.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

In two weeks, the company will unveil Twyla Tharp's newest work, "Rabbit and Rogue," set to a commissioned score by Danny Elfman. In the meantime, the season opens with the swashbuckling "Le Corsaire," a romp of a ballet, featuring slave traders, seductive harem girls, fleet-footed pirates (including, on some nights, the fleetest of them all, Herman Cornejo), a shipwreck, and one of the most famous and exciting pas de deux (really a pas de trois) in the classical repertory, for Medora and Ali, the virtuosic slave. Ali has lately become something of a specialty for Angel Corella, who performs the role several times this week. Casts appear on the company's Web site. ♦ May 20, May 22-23, and May 26 at 8 and May 21 and May 24 at 2 and 8: "Le Corsaire." ♦ May 27 at 8: "Swan Lake." (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through July 12.)

MOMIX

Moses Pendleton's company is back for its annual run, this week performing "Passion." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800.

May 20-21 and May 27 at 7:30, May 22-23 at 8, May 24 at 2 and 8, and May 25 at 2 and 7:30. Through June 8.)

CHASE BROCK EXPERIENCE
A Broadway baby in the concert-dance world, the prolific choreographer fills his candy-bright company's second New York season with commissioned scores by Joshua Rosenblum, Jan Warner, and Joseph Zellnik and a contemporary interpretation of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. May 22-25 at 8.)

DANCEAFRICA
The long-running, ever-joyous festival welcomes Ceesay Kujabi and the Bachinab, from Gambia; the all-female ensemble Giwayen Mata, from Atlanta; students of the venerable LaRocque Bey School of Dance Theatre, from Harlem; and the BAM Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble, from Bed-Stuy. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 23 at 7:30, May 24 at 2 and 7:30, and May 25-26 at 3.)

"LA MAMA MOVES"
This week, at the Club, the superabundant festival features new works by Miguel Gutierrez and Ben Munisteri, along with a performance by John Jasperse. At the Annex, a night of swing dancing by Eva Arce and the Four Jivadeers and music by the Cangelosi Cards precedes an evening of downtown divas: Sara Rudner, Pam Tanowitz, Sally Silvers, Jodi Melnick, Vicky Shick, and Barbara Mahler. The First Floor black-box theatre hosts an international gathering that includes Luciana Achugar, Lee-Saar, and Gerald Casel. (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. The Annex: May 23-24 at 7:30. The First Floor: May 23-25 at 8. The Club: May 23-24 at 10 and May 25 at 5:30. Through June 1.)

"HOOFERS' HOUSE"
The series of tap jam sessions put on periodically by the Studio Museum in Harlem takes a trip downtown to the Kitchen. These are informal, impromptu affairs, open to whoever shows up, and the presence of the unvanquished Jason Samuels Smith as host should attract some young lions. The versatile DJ Reborn spins accompaniment, while the video artist Rashaad Newsome provides visuals. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. May 23 at 8.)

TAP EXTRAVAGANZA
Every year around National Tap Dance Day, the New York tap-dance community gathers to pay tribute to its own; this time, the honorees include Maurice Hines, the brother of Gregory. Though the show looks to be a little lacklustre, any bill with the gangly wonder Michelle Dorrance and the Hell's Kitchen gunslinger Jason Samuels Smith can't be entirely wanting in excitement. The unflappable Frank Owens keeps things swinging with his trio. (Fashion Institute of Technology, Haft Auditorium, 227 W. 27th St. 718-232-1852. May 25 at 7.)

MOVEMENT RESEARCH SPRING FESTIVAL
Judson Memorial Church, the birthplace of postmodern American dance, serves as the epicenter of this geographically and intellectually diverse two-week festival focussing on improvisation, process, and the exploration of new trends in dance. Curated by the downtown fixtures Milka Djordjevich, Jeff Larson, Chris Peck, and Anna Sperber, the series is free-form and all-inclusive (with a session of collective public meditation, a "mass slowdown ritual," and a "sleepover experience"), led by local choreographers such as Marissa Perel, Paige Martin, and Chase Granoff, as well as artists from beyond New York, including the Vienna-based Company Two in One and Salva Sanchis, from Brussels. (Various venues. For a complete schedule, visit www.movementresearch.org/festival/08. May 26-June 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

AMATO OPERA
With the Metropolitan Opera and City Opera seasons over and done, Anthony Amato's Lilliputian company, a longtime outfit made up of professionals and eager amateurs, stands alone in its tiny theatre in the East Village. This month, they offer an English-language production of **"Così Fan Tutte,"** Mozart's enticingly complex battle of the sexes; expect hearty Italian hill-town charm, not polished uptown elegance. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. May 24 at 7:30 and May 25 at 2:30.)

ELLIOTT CARTER'S "WHAT NEXT?"
Recorded opera competes with the real thing during the quietest part of the season. The Museum of Modern Art will show a film of the 2006 Tanglewood performance of Carter's surreal yet engaging opera (written with the librettist Paul Griffiths), about the aftermath of an automobile accident, at its Roy and Niuta Titus Theatre 1. After the screening, James Levine, who conducted the performance, will discuss the work with the composer and with the critic Richard Dyer. (11 W. 53rd St. May 21 at 6:30. For tickets, visit www.moma.org.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With Riccardo Muti—the Philharmonic's principal guest conductor in all but name—moving on to the big post at the Chicago Symphony, will David Robertson's star rise? He dominates this month, at least, at the Philharmonic; his first program combines the seriousness of Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("Unfinished") and Sibelius's Symphony No. 1 with the lubricious charm of Korngold's Violin Concerto (with Glenn Dicterow). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 22 at 7:30 and May 23-24 at 8.) ♦ Robertson conducts the Sibelius on a Saturday-matinée concert that begins with a chamber performance of Mozart's Serenade in E-Flat for Wind Octet. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 24 at 2.) ♦ Robertson will also lead the orchestra's annual free concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; the program pairs Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony with Mendelssohn's effervescent Symphony No. 4, "Italian." (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. May 26 at 8. No tickets required.)

BACHANALIA
In a concert commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Jewish state, Nina Beilina's chamber orchestra offers a program of music by such Israeli composers as André Hajdu and Igor Tkachenko (a première), along with "Triptych for Strings," by the Franco-Polish composer Alexandre Tansman, a colleague of Schoenberg and Stravinsky who spent the years of the Second World War in Los Angeles's brilliant émigré community. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 21 at 8.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA COMMENCEMENT CONCERT
It's time to put on the mortarboards at Juilliard, and, to celebrate, James DePreist will lead the school's foremost ensemble in a concert that features two meaty Austrian symphonies (Beethoven's "Pastoral" and Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D Major), along with William Schuman's clangorous "American Festival Overture." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 21 at 8.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA
James Levine, who always seems to have an Elliott Carter première in hand, reaches back into the New York master's catalogue to begin his next concert at Carnegie Hall with Variations for Orchestra (1955), a work that finds the composer still coming out of Copland's shadow. The program also offers Schumann's Piano Concerto (with Jonathan Biss) and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. (212-247-7800. May 22 at 8.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY
Ryan McAdams closes his first season at the head of the acclaimed student ensemble with an adventurous concert that features not only a repertory favorite—Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 in E Minor—but also Philip Glass's Concerto Fantasy for Two Timpanists (in which James Deitz and Svet Stoyanov do the honors) and the world pre-

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mière of a work by the young composer Lembit Beecher ("Faded, Manic, Black, and White"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-581-5933. May 25 at 2.)

RECITALS

"EMF LAB AT THE FLEA THEATRE"
A group of daredevil musicians—including the violinist Todd Reynolds, the bass clarinettist Michael Lowenstern, and the Sonic Youth guitarist Lee Ranaldo—gather to perform three concerts under the umbrella of the Electronic Music Foundation that explore the intersection of live instruments and digital technology. The programs feature music by Reynolds, Jenny Olivia Johnson, Jennifer Stock, and Aleksei Stevens, among others. (41 White St. 212-352-3101. May 20-22 at 7. For details, see www.emfproductions.org.)

NINE CIRCLES CHAMBER THEATRE
In "Reflections: Chills or Thrills?," the violinist Gil Morgenstern, the violist Kathryn Lockwood, and the cellist Marcy Rosen join the neuroscientist Robert Zattore (of McGill University) for a concert-lecture that investigates how people react to different forms of music. The program is certainly varied: music for string trio by Purcell, Beethoven, and Penderecki. (Rubin Museum of Art, 150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. May 21 at 7.)

SADIE ROSALES
Few American composers approach song composition with as much imagination and integrity as Lisa Bielawa. Her song cycle "Hurry"—a sequence of Boris Pasternak settings in English translation, commissioned for Dawn Upshaw's "Perspectives" series at Carnegie Hall in 2004—closes the New York début recital of this young soprano at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. Rosales also sings classic songs by Sibelius, Berg (the "Seven Early Songs"), Turina, and Britten (the rarely performed "Birthday Hansel," based on texts by Robert Burns, for soprano and harp). (212-932-2022. May 21 at 8.)

TAKA KIGAWA
The pianist, a respected advocate for the most challenging of modern scores, offers his almost-yearly solo recital at the Greenwich House Music School—a hefty program of works by Karen Tanaka, Tristan Murail, Debussy ("Images," Books I and II), and Stravinsky (the thrilling "Three Movements from 'Petrushka' "). (46 Barrow St. May 21 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

AMERICA'S DREAM CHAMBER ARTISTS
The composer and fiddler Mark O'Connor is the guest of this recently formed ensemble of excellent young players (featuring the violinist Timothy Fain). In the ensemble's latest concert, two of O'Connor's classical works (the Piano Trio No. 1 and a new work for flute and strings) share the bill with Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello and Barber's String Quartet, Op. 11 (including the Adagio for Strings). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 22 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Brooklyn's floating chamber-music series is at its bustling best this weekend. May 22 at 8: The weekly Jazz Night features a quartet that includes the saxophonist Dayna Stephens and the drummer Tim Bulkley; fireworks will entertain the audience at intermission. ♦ May 23 at 8: The pianist Elena Ulyanova offers a traditional menu of works by Haydn, Beethoven (the "Appassionata" Sonata), Rachmaninoff, and Brahms (the "Paganini Variations," Book II). ♦ May 24 at 8 and May 25 at 4: The composer-pianist David Del Tredici joins the violinist Mark Peskanov and the cellist Scott Kluksdahl for a concert that emphasizes both the conservative ("Grand Trio") and the provocative ("Love Addiction," with the baritone Chris Pedro Trakas) sides of his musical personality. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"TWO DOLLAR CONCERT"
João Carlos Martins, an admired pianist and conductor who has withstood some hard knocks of the medical kind in the past four decades, is a survivor; his latest cause is the preservation of the Amazonian rain forest, which he highlighted in a "One Dollar Concert" at Carnegie Hall last year. Now he returns to offer another concert on the same theme—albeit at a slightly higher price—in which he will conduct and perform with his Bachiana Chamber Orchestra in a program of music by Bach (the Third Orchestral Suite), Mozart (the slow movements of the Piano Concertos Nos. 23 and 27), Tom Jobim, and Mateus Araujo (a world première). (212-247-7800. May 23 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANNERY POND CONCERTS
The summer season begins a little early at Christian Steiner's almost-private series, in which the renowned classical-music photographer invites talented friends to concertize in an acoustically commodious Shaker barn. The schedule begins with a program in which the tenor Nicholas Phan joins the violinist Soovin Kim, the cellist Edward Arron, and the pianist Pedja Muzijevic to offer works by Haydn, Fauré ("La Bonne Chanson"), Britten, and Schumann (the Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor). (New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-9441. May 25 at 3.)

"The Children of Huang Shi," directed by Roger Spottiswoode, opens May 23.

FIDO NESTI

MOVIES OPENING

THE CHILDREN OF HUANG SHI
Roger Spottiswoode directed this historical drama, about a British journalist and an Australian nurse who try to save orphans during the invasion of China by Japan in 1937. Starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Radha Mitchell, Michelle Yeoh, Guang Li, and Chow Yun-Fat. Opening May 23. (In wide release.)

THE EDGE OF HEAVEN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. In German, Turkish, and English. Opening May 21. (Film Forum.)

INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL
Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and a young professor (Shia LaBeouf) team up to rescue ancient treasures from Soviet agents. Directed by Steven Spielberg; co-starring Cate Blanchett. Opening May 22. (In wide release.)

A JIHAD FOR LOVE
A documentary by Parvez Sharma, about gay Muslims throughout the world. Opening May 21. (IFC Center.)

WAR, INC.
A drama, directed by Joshua Seftel, about a hit man who is hired by a corporation to kill an official in the Middle East. Starring Dan Aykroyd, Joan Cusack, John Cusack, Hilary Duff, Ben Kingsley, and Marisa Tomei. Opening May 23. (Angelika Film Center.)

NOW PLAYING

BABY MAMA
Tina Fey plays Kate, a single woman with a well-paying job and a gap in her life where a baby is meant to be. Having handed over a sizable check to a surrogacy service—whose airy yet formidable boss (Sigourney Weaver) is clearly on loan from Stepford—she has her eggs implanted in the womb of Angie (Amy Poehler). One small wrench of plot, and our two heroines are shacked up together. What follows is intended to cast a topical light on the quandary of working mothers, but in fact it functions best as a straightforward culture clash, with Kate being both appalled and chilled by the perky presence of Angie, for whom a can of Red Bull counts as a health drink. Michael McCullers writes more fluently than he directs, and the movie springs few surprises, relying for vigor on the sparring of its heroines; there is a dud role for Greg Kinnear as Kate's wimpy new lover, but a great (and uncredited) one for Steve Martin. He plays the owner of an organic-food chain, at once laid-back and ludicrous: "Time is love. Gotta run."—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/28/08.) (In wide release.)

FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL
Peter Bretter (Jason Segel), a Los Angeles composer, writes music for a ridiculous television cop series starring his girlfriend, Sarah Marshall (Kristen Bell). When Sarah dumps him, he's miserable and lost, and he takes off for Hawaii, only to run into Sarah and her new boyfriend (Russell Brand), a British rocker and love god, who are staying at his hotel. This latest comedy from the Judd Apatow factory (he produced it; Segel, a longtime actor in his circle, wrote it; and Nicholas Stoller, an Apatow writing partner, directed it) is loose, rhythmless, and only fitfully funny—the lush, soft, damp beauty of Hawaii and the near-nakedness of the characters defeat comedy. Segel, a big guy, handsome in a slightly sappy way, humiliates himself over and over, which is supposed to be endearing. But moviegoers want a romantic hero with some sex appeal and some strength, and Segel's harmless routine wears us out. The best thing in the movie is Brand, who has dark locks that hang straight down, hipster-Biblical style, and who exudes sex. With members of the Apatow gang (Paul Rudd, Jonah Hill, Bill Hader) operating in second gear.—*David Denby* (4/21/08) (In wide release.)

HAROLD & KUMAR ESCAPE FROM GUANTANAMO BAY

This cinematic burlesque show, in which the baggy pants keep dropping and occasionally fall off altogether, is perhaps the first bottomless comedy—much of the humor, and a fair amount of the nakedness, is concentrated below the belt. Harold (John Cho), a Korean-American financial guy, and Kumar (Kal Penn), an Indian-American would-be medical student, run afoul of the war on terror, get sent to Guantánamo, escape to the mainland, and wander around the South. The writer-director team of Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, who also wrote (but did not direct) "Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle," have no better than primitive skills. By any rational standard, it's a terrible piece of work, yet its heart is in the right place. The chief fool here is a paranoid Homeland Security official (Rob Corddry), who sees everyone but whites as foreigners and likely terrorist collaborators. The Harold & Kumar movies, in their slovenly way, mark the transition to a post-racial society in which, as the *Salon* movie critic Stephanie Zacharek put it, "no one in real life can say definitively what an American looks like."—*D.D.* (5/19/08) (In wide release.)

IRON MAN

Robert Downey, Jr., as Tony Stark, billionaire arms manufacturer and playboy, almost completely dominates this whooshing junk pile. Nothing matters to Tony except inventing things and having a good time, and Downey, muttering to himself, ignores everyone else in the movie for as long as he can. Fixing his eyes at last on another character, he seems faintly annoyed that his privacy has been violated. Yet he delivers—to the camera, and to us. In this updating of Stan Lee's Marvel Comics character (who first appeared in 1963), Tony gets captured by wild-eyed fanatics who hang out in Afghan caves; they command him to make missiles out of scraps, but instead he creates a huge suit of armor and climbs into it. The monster shoots bullets and emits liquid flames from his gauntlets, and when he gets bored he just flies away. This superhero has no vulnerabilities or specialized skills; he's an all-purpose fighting vehicle—an airborne RoboCop. Most of the digital special effects look cheesy, and Terrence Howard and Gwyneth Paltrow drag themselves through embarrassing roles, but Jeff Bridges, as Obadiah Stane, Tony's treacherous No. 2 at the arms company, performs with professional skill. Jon Favreau directed, and two writing teams, Mark Fergus and Hawk Ostby, along with Art Marcum and Matt Holloway, did the adaptation.—*D.D.* (5/5/08) (In wide release.)

LOVE AFFAIR

With Charles Boyer as an international playboy who falls hard for a headstrong American (Irene Dunne) on a voyage to New York, Leo McCarey's 1939 comedy-cum-tearjerker is a classic—the prototype of the "You'll laugh! You'll cry!" kind of movie. (It seems like even more of a pop miracle after two leaden remakes: McCarey's own "An Affair to Remember," with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr, and Glenn Gordon Caron's embarrassing "Love Affair," with Warren Beatty and Annette Bening.) Boyer delivers an incomparably fluent romantic performance. He turns worldliness into a quality at once frank and innocent, and Dunne responds to him superbly, melting into him as he bids her good night. While the two weigh their shipboard romance against the prosaic mates who await them in Gotham, they conjure a beguiling blend of suavity and fervor. The film careers into melodrama when the two debark, planning to meet six months later at the top of the Empire State Building. But McCarey builds to his heart-tugging climax with a kitschy daring; the director and his stars never lose their conviction, and the final scene is a genuine emotional twister. McCarey and Mildred Cram cooked up the story, Delmer Daves and Donald Ogden Stewart got credit for the script, and several other writers worked on it, including S. N. Behrman.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; May 25 and May 27.)

MY FATHER MY LORD

David Volach's first feature film, about Menachem (Ilan Griff), the increasingly skeptical only child of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi and scholar in Jerusalem, is basically a very slick student film, sentimental and overdemonstrative. But Volach, who comes from a family like Menachem's, seems to have made his film under the pressure of great inner necessity, bearing tender yet ambivalent witness to a world that he knows intimately. A pair of scenes showing the teaching of religious doctrine—one, for children, concerning Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and another, for adults, about the righteous men for whom the world was created—deftly suggest his view of the power and the limitations of the big ideas at work in traditional Judaism. Within the style and framework of a manipulative melodrama, Volach lets loose a cry: that the unyielding strictures of religious doctrine and practice are killing the best of youth. In Hebrew and Yiddish.—*Richard Brody* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOISE

An antic philosophical comedy about a frustrated New Yorker, David Owen (Tim Robbins), who is going nuts from the city racket, especially car alarms, which, easily set off, interrupt his lovemaking with his wife, among many other things. He attacks the throbbing vehicles with bats and hammers; he slashes tires and snips wires, and jumps up and down on hoods like a drunken teen-ager. Famous throughout the city as the Rectifier, he stalks around at night like Batman, provoking the mayor (William Hurt) to rage. The writer-director, Henry Bean ("The Believer"), has an unsteady touch; the picture moves back and forth between farce and celebration of urban activism, but Bean has a feeling for the comedy and stress of life in the city. The movie is pretty consistently entertaining. Robbins can seem mulish and out of it, but then, as an impish grin takes over his face, he suddenly becomes inspired. With Bridget Moynahan, as his wife, and the vibrantly intelligent and beautiful Margarita Levieva, as the soulful young Russian writer and philosophy student he has a fling with.—*D.D.* (5/19/08) (Empire 25 and Village Theatre VII.)

ROMAN DE GARE

The new thriller from Claude Lelouch shows that, at the age of seventy, he has lost none of his taste for the glossy, meandering narrative. We spend much of the film trying to place Pierre (Dominique Pinon), who may be either an innocent traveller or a murderer wanted by French police; when he picks up a stranded woman (Audrey Dana) at a gas station, we fear for her safety, yet each seems to lift the spirits of the other. This sense of pleasure under threat also spreads into the life of Judith Ralitzer (Fanny Ardant), a crime writer whose public success conceals an unflattering secret. By the end, the various plotlines have intertwined, but only just, with some scenes rolling on too long, as though in search of further mysteries; the result feels rather more cunning than satisfying, and, if the movie coheres, it is owing to the dedication of its players—especially Dana, who rises above the sniping of her early scenes, and Pinon, whose ever-slipping spectacles and scrunched, unreadable features make him one of the more implausible (and more winning) leading men of our time. In French.—*A.L.* (4/28/08) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SON OF RAMBOW

For forty minutes or so, Garth Jennings's film about childhood—to be specific, about the place of film in childhood—unfolds with tenderness, style, and wit. The place is provincial England, the time is the nineteen-eighties, and the hero is Will Proudfoot (Bill Milner), a shy and studious boy who lives with his mother among the Plymouth Brethren, a religious sect. Still, he attends a normal school, even if he has to leave the class whenever the others are watching a videotape (TV being a device of the Devil). Will meets, fights, and befriends another pupil, Lee Carter (Will Poulter), a rebellious soul from a messed-up family. Together, the unlikely duo decide to shoot their own version of the Sylvester Stallone vehicle "Rambo: First Blood"—not just Will's favorite film but the only one he has ever seen. As homages go,

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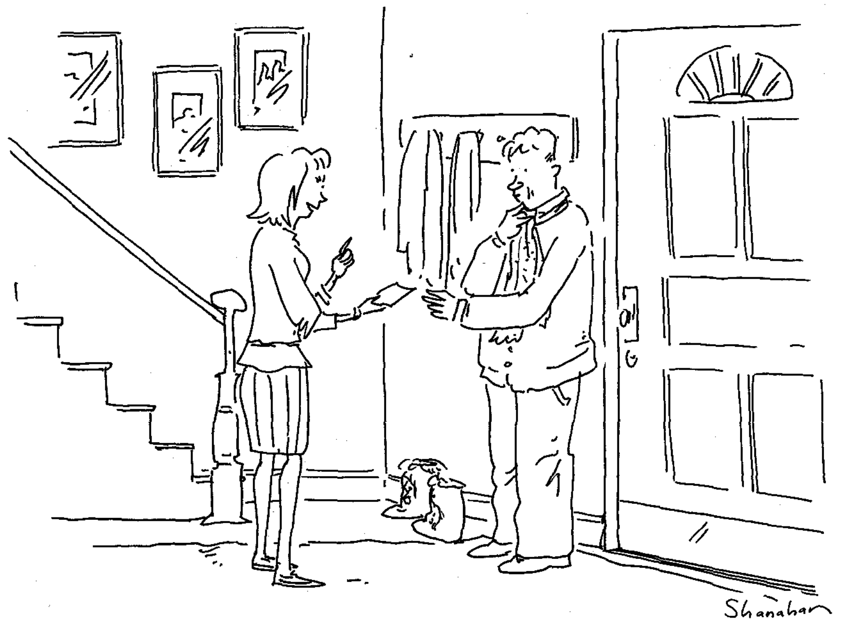

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this feels both wild and innocent, and some sequences are invaded by bursts of graphics and cartoons—what better image for the restless junior mind? Once the boys' filming starts, however, and other characters and mini-plots are filtered into the action, the movie, sadly, loses both charm and grip. The slapstick grows too silly to be convincing, and, as with the recent "Be Kind Rewind," we are left with an insoluble puzzle: how do you stop a film about amateurs from sliding into the clunky?—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

SPEED RACER

The Wachowski brothers, picking up where they left off with the "Matrix" trilogy, resume the task of bludgeoning our senses into submission. Their weapon of choice on this occasion is the race car—or, rather, a computer-generated parody of a car, as curvy and unstoppable as a child's dream of velocity, surging around a virtual track and clashing with its rivals. The hero really is called Speed Racer (Emile Hirsch), which more or less defines his career options. His dearest wish is to become world champion and thus repay the loving confidence of his parents (John Goodman and Susan Sarandon). The world conjured up and customized for the film is blindingly bright, caught between the goofy and the slick, but, like even the best Hawaiian shirt, it quickly tires the eye, and the story, which should surely match the clean lines of the vehicles, feels muddy with complication; do kids in the audience really want to hear about automotive share prices? The villain, personified by Roger Allam, turns out to represent big business: an interesting choice of target for a major motion picture. With Christina Ricci; or, at any rate, a perfect clone, declawed and unsexed, pretending to be her.—*A.L.* (5/12/08) (In wide release.)

THEN SHE FOUND ME

Helen Hunt's first film as a director is about a thirty-nine-year-old grade-school teacher, April (Hunt), who has the unsettling experience of becoming a mother and a daughter at the same time. Raised by adoptive parents, April has long felt the absence of her biological mother and father. At her school, she falls in love with the imperious but morose father (Colin Firth) of one of her students just as her husband (Matthew Broderick), who's leaving her, gets her pregnant. Her birth mother then shows up, in the form of Bette Midler, who barges into the movie like Shelley Winters on roller skates. "Then She Found Me" is an affecting comedy about bright people acting on their emotions and screwing things up. What makes it work is the filmmakers' curiosity about the many-sidedness of need—the way that genuine benevolence can be cloaked in blunt intrusiveness or that insults can be a reckless demand for love. Hunt, Alice Arlen, and Victor Levin adapted Elinor Lipman's 1990 novel.—*D.D.* (5/5/08) (Chelsea Cinemas and First and 62nd Cinemas.)

UP THE YANGTZE

The Canadian filmmaker Yung Chang's documentary, about a pleasure cruise for tourists on the Yangtze River, which is rising and submerging the towns on its banks as a result of the construction of the vast Three Gorges Dam, has most of the flaws endemic to contemporary documentary filmmaking: disembodied voice-overs, archival inserts, portentous music, pretty pictures, easy ironies. Despite its anesthetic banality, the film offers a painful view of the grotesque inequities in Chinese society, the censorship and fear that weigh on its citizens, the government's unresponsiveness to the people's stifled voices, and the tight controls on what Westerners are allowed to see (such as a Potemkin village for residents displaced by the river's rising waters). However, compared with "Still Life," Jia Zhangke's recent fictional depiction of the dam's destructive effects, this documentary seems slick, contrived, and artificial. In Mandarin and English.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

If the title is a question, the answer is: not much. A trader from New York (Cameron Diaz), dumped by her mean boyfriend, goes to Las Vegas to swamp her sorrows and, after a busy night, ends up in

TABLES FOR TWO
ELETTARIA

HONORE BROWN

33 W. 8th St. (212-677-3833)—Any restaurant formed by the remaining Presidential candidates (two parts Kenya and Kansas; one part Panama Canal Zone; a dash of Anywhere You Want) would surely resemble Elettaria, a kaleidoscope of cultures and histories. Elettaria's chef, Akhtar Nawab, was born to Indian émigrés and grew up in Wisconsin and Kentucky. The parents of his partner, Noel Cruz, the front-of-the-house guy, are native Filipinos, and Cruz spent his younger years in Chicago, Florida, and Hawaii. While both men passed through such rarefied establishments as Gramercy Tavern and the French Culinary Institute, and their new venture's name is erudite (*Elettaria:* from the Tamil; genus of cardamom, the world's third most expensive spice), they've paid their dues at more pedestrian eateries: Ditto's Bar and Grill, for example, in Louisville ("Eating Is Worth Repeating!"). Theirs is a ragbag experience worthy of Emma Lazarus.

Officially, Elettaria presents a "seasonal, spice-driven American menu"—conventional fare adjusted at Nawab's megrim. Small plates, which outnumber entrées, include a delicately rendered braised pig's foot, covered with watercress, frisée, and flash-fried cashews. The dish is delightful; after all, when a pig rolls in the mud it does so off its feet. An invigorating crabmeat rezala comes with a turmeric-onion soubise and some crispy gnocchi—in essence, pea-size French fries. With the entrées, Nawab takes the familiar—steak, poultry, fish—and roguishly injects spices in ways unforeseen and unreliable. The roasted chicken, flavored with dehydrated-tomato powder, has an unfortunate hint of cured bacon, and its accompanying sweet-and-sour ravioli doesn't help. But the duck and its keema-derived ragout bestow comfort via eight seasonings: onion, ginger, garlic, chile pepper, saffron, clove, turmeric, and—there she is—*Elettaria cardamomum.*

All this occurs in a kitchen that could be called open, except that that would intimate a degree of enclosure; Nawab and his crew are instead just there, their side and our side distinguishable only by a small, waist-high counter. The chopping and the stirring and the flipping are transfixing to watch. Nawab, who sports an insouciant, Clooney-like scruff, is swarthily handsome, and diners, notably women, eagerly approach to shake his hand. (Blame it on the Zombie Punch, one of the house's more lethal cocktails, but a recent diner had to admit, "He *is* pretty good-looking.") The rest of the place is a study in disjointed beauty: walls and curtains of different colors, mismatched lamps, a phony staircase. It's interior design by cultural collision. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $18-$28.)

—Mike Peed

possession of (a) a three-million-dollar jackpot and (b) an unwanted husband (Ashton Kutcher), who turns out to be a wastrel and a slob. A judge, showing that firm grasp of the law which only movies can provide, decrees that the couple must live together in order to claim a share of the cash. In other words, we are stuck with yet another case of the lady and the tramp—subtly altered, in this instance, by the fact that Kutcher's character is even more of a jerk at the end, once he has scrubbed up and calmed down, than he was at the beginning. If you caught the trailer in theatres, you've seen all there is to see. With Treat Williams, who deserves better. Directed by Tom Vaughan.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: PRINCE CASPIAN: In wide release. **MADE OF HONOR:** In wide release. **REPRISE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema. **SANGRE DE MI SANGRE:** IFC Center. **YELLA:** Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of James Nares. May 21 at 7:30: Program 6, including "Suicide? No, Murder" (1977). ♦ May 22 at 7:30: Program 7, including "Pendulum" (1976), followed by a discussion with the writer Luc Sante and the director. ♦ "Korea on Film." All films are in Korean. May 22 at 7 and May 24 at 4:30: "The Marines Who Never Returned" (1963, Lee Man-Hui). ♦ May 22 at 9:30 and May 24 at 7: "Rainy Days" (1979, Yu Hyun-Mok). ♦ May 23 at 7 and May 25 at 9: "Warm Winter Was Gone" (1984, Bae Chang-Ho). ♦ May 23 at 9:30 and May 25 at 4:15: "To the Starry Island" (1994, Park Kwang-Su). ♦ May 24 at 9:30 and May 25 at 6:30: "Joint Security Area" (2000, Park Chan-Wook). ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 24 at 3:30: Short films by George and Mike Kuchar, Program 1 (1959-63). ♦ May 24 at 5:30: Short films by George and Mike Kuchar, Program 2 (1958-63). ♦ May 25 at 5:30: Short films by George Landow, a.k.a. Owen Land (1961-73).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinemachat with Elliott Stein." May 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Verdict" (1946, Don Siegel). ♦ Special screening. May 22 at 7: "An American Dream" (1966, Robert Gist), with an introduction by the writer and curator Michael Chaiken, who will also present rare archival footage. ♦ "DanceAfrica Film." May 23 and May 26 at 4:30: "Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony" (2003, Lee Hirsch; in English and Zulu). ♦ May 24 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Les Saignantes" (2005, Jean-Pierre Bekolo; in French). ♦ May 25 at 2 and 6:50: "Juju Factory" (2006, Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda; in French). ♦ May 25 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Clouds Over Conakry" (2007, Cheick F. Camara; in French). ♦ May 26 at 6:50 and 9:15: "A Love During the War" (2005, Osvalde Lewat-Hallade; in French, Swahili, and Lingala) and "Growing Stronger" (2005, Tsitsi Dangarembga; in English and Shona). ♦ "Brooklyn Bridge at 125." May 24 at 4:30: "Brooklyn Bridge" (1981, Ken Burns).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through June 5: "Godard's 60s." All films are in French. May 21 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Alphaville" (1965) and "Charlotte et Véronique," a.k.a. "All the Boys Are Called Patrick" (1958). ♦ May 22 at 1:30, 3:30, and 5:30 and May 23-24 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Band of Outsiders" (1964). ♦ May 22 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Made in U.S.A." (1966). ♦ May 25-26 at 1:10, 3:15, 5:30, 7:35, and 9:40 and May 27 at 1:10, 3:15, and 5:30: "Masculine Feminine" (1966). The 3:15 screening on May 25 will be introduced by the *New Yorker* writer Richard Brody. ♦ May 27 at 7:35 and 9:40: "Sympathy for the Devil" (1968). ♦ In revival. May 21-27 at 1:15, 3:15, 6, 8, and 10: "Annie Hall" (1977, Woody Allen).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"World Nomads: African Cinema." May 27 at 7: An homage to Ousmane Sembene, including "Borom Sarret" (1966, Sembene; in French), introduced by Mamadou Diouf.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Kenji Mizoguchi. May 23-26 at 11 A.M.: "Ugetsu" (1953; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 23-25: "Alien" (1979, Ridley Scott). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. May 27 at 8: "The Agronomist" (2003, Jonathan Demme), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." May 21-23 at 1:30: "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943, Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid) and "A Study in Choreography for Camera" (1945, Deren). ♦ The films of Peter Hutton. May 21 at 6:15: "Landscape (for Manon)" (1986-87), "In Titan's Goblet" (1991), and "Study of a River" (1994-95). ♦ May 22 at 6:15: "New York Portrait," Parts I-III (1978-90). ♦ May 23 at 6: "Looking at the Sea" (2000-01) and "Skagafjördur" (2002-04). ♦ May 26 at 6: "At Sea" (2004-07). ♦ The films of Alanis Obomsawin. May 21 at 8: "Rocks at Whiskey Trench" (2000). ♦ May 22 at 8: "Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child" (1986) and "Gene Boy Came Home" (2007). ♦ May 23 at 8: "Amisk" (1977) and "Incident at Restigouche" (1984). ♦ May 24 at 4: "Is the Crown at War with Us" (2002). ♦ May 25 at 2: "Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance" (1993). ♦ May 25 at 4:30: "My Name Is Kahentiiosta" (1995) and "Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man" (1997). ♦ May 26 at 2: "Mother of Many Children" (1977). ♦ "Jazz Score." May 22 at 6:15: "Le Départ" (1967, Jerzy Skolimowski; in French) and "Banner" (1965, Miroslaw Kijowicz; in Polish). ♦ May 22 at 8:30: "Knife in the Water" (1962, Roman Polanski; in Polish) and "The Fat and the Lean" (1961, Polanski; in Polish). ♦ May 23 at 7 and May 24 at 3: "Blow-Up" (1966, Michelangelo Antonioni) and "Herbie" (1966, George Lucas). ♦ May 24 at 6 and May 25 at 2:30: "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957, Alexander Mackendrick). ♦ May 24 at 8 and May 25 at 5: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 23 at 8: "The Fury" (1978, Brian De Palma).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 23-25: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Saint and Sinner: The Tempestuous Career of Jennifer Jones." May 21 at 1 and 8:15: "Madame Bovary" (1949, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ May 21 at 3:30: "Duel in the Sun" (1946, King Vidor). ♦ May 21 at 6:15: "Beat the Devil" (1953, John Huston). ♦ May 22 at 8: "Tender Is the Night" (1962, Henry King). ♦ May 23 at 2:30: "Since You Went Away" (1944, John Cromwell). ♦ May 23 at 6: "Good Morning, Miss Dove" (1955, Henry Koster). ♦ May 24 at 2:30: "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing" (1955, King). ♦ "Charles Boyer and the Art of Seduction." May 23 at 8:15 and May 25 at 5:30: "Le Bonheur" (1934, Marcel L'Herbier; in French). ♦ May 24 at 4:40: "Cluny Brown" (1946, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ May 24 at 6:40: "Conquest" (1937, Clarence Brown). ♦ May 24 at 9 and May 25 at 1: "Gaslight" (1944, George Cukor). ♦ May 25 at 3:15 and May 26 at 8: "Hold Back the Dawn" (1941, Mitchell Leisen). ♦ May 25 at 7:20 and May 27 at 8:30: "Love Affair" (†). ♦ May 25 at 9:15 and May 27 at 6:30: "A Woman's Vengeance" (1948, Zoltan Korda). ♦ May 26 at 2 and May 27 at 4:40: "The First Legion" (1951, Douglas Sirk). ♦ May 26 at 3:50: "The Earrings of

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Madame de . . ." (1953, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ May 26 at 6 and May 27 at 2:30: "History Is Made at Night" (1937, Frank Borzage).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
Bryant Park's reading series gets under way for the season on May 21 at 12:30 with Augusten Burroughs, who will read from his latest book, "A Wolf at the Table: A Memoir of My Father." (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-768-4242.)

"SELECTED SHORTS"
The actors Harris Yulin and Laura Esterman read stories about travelling by Miranda July, Grace Paley, and H. E. Bates. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 21 at 7:30.)

"POETS IN THE GALLERIES"
In 1657, thirty residents of Flushing wrote and signed a missive to New Amsterdam's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, protesting the persecution of Quakers in the area. The Queens Museum of Art's new exhibit "This Case of Conscience: Spiritual Flushing and the Remonstrance" displays the original document, along with the reflections of nine contemporary artists on the subject of religious freedom. The museum has arranged for tours of the exhibit on Sundays, accompanied by readings by local poets; the first such event, featuring Vijay Seshadri, is on May 25 at 5. The show runs through June 29. (New York City Building, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. 718-592-9700.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
The novelists Paula Fox and Lynne Tillman read from their work. (126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary. May 27 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"SUBWAY MOON"
The saxophonist, composer, and poet Roy Nathanson and his band the Jazz Passengers mark the fortieth anniversary of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The multimedia show features the Passengers' eclectic compositions, along with stories by local high-school kids about the New York City subway system and by French middle schoolers about the Paris Métro. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. No tickets necessary. May 21 at 6.)

LOWER EAST SIDE FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS
Hundreds of downtown performers—from puppeteers and poets to actors and acrobats—converge on the Theatre for the New City. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. No tickets necessary. May 23-25. For a complete schedule, visit www.theaterforthenewcity.net.)

SPRING FAMILY DAY
The Guggenheim Museum, which is currently displaying some two hundred works by public elementary-school students, continues to focus on the younger generation with this annual event. Storytelling and artmaking activities are planned. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3500. May 25, from 1 to 4.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Sotheby's sale of American art (May 22) is enhanced by one of Edward Hicks's "Peaceable Kingdom" paintings; this iteration of the Quaker preacher's vision of Heaven (circa 1846-48), which, until recently, was displayed at the American Folk Art Museum, is being sold to help pay off the formidable debts of the New York jeweller and folk-art collector Ralph O. Esmerian. An auction of American Indian art on the following day (May 23) offers deep-hued handspun Navajo blankets, a miniature Haida totem pole, and a profusion of beautiful and enigmatic polychromed wooden masks. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The American auction at **Christie's** (May 21) features a painting by Marsden Hartley, "Lighthouse," made during his period in Berlin (1913-15); a brightly colored composition that incorporates elements of Cubism and Expressionism, it has remained in Germany since it was created. The sale, which also includes works by Mary Cassatt, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, and John Singer Sargent, is followed by an auction of American and European silver (May 22). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips**, taking a curatorial approach to its inaugural sale of modern and contemporary prints and multiples (May 21), attempts to create an aesthetic and thematic "dialogue" between diverse artists (Duchamp, Lucian Freud, and Elizabeth Frink, for example, or Dubuffet, Picasso, and Peter Doig). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.) ♦ **Swann** offers an auction of ocean-liner memorabilia (May 22) from the collection of the late maritime historian Frank O. Braynard (a co-founder of the South Street Seaport Museum), including letters from the White Star Line to survivors of passengers lost on the Titanic and photographs of Rudolph Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks aboard the U.S.S. Leviathan. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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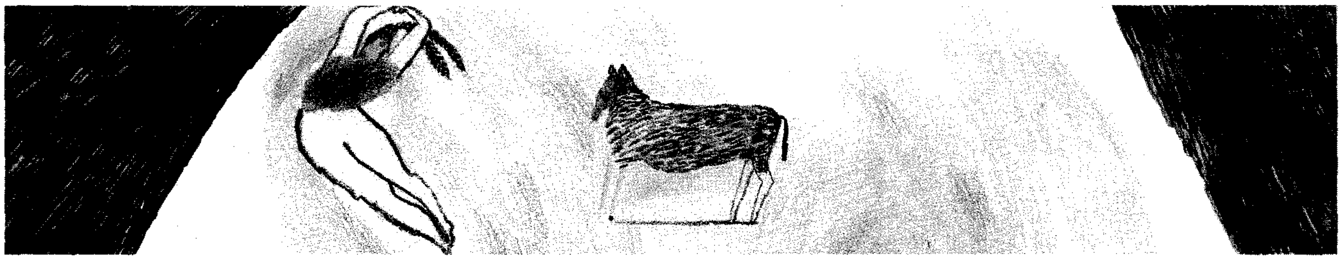


Herman Cornejo and American Ballet Theatre.

LAURA CARLIN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
UTAH'S FINEST
May 29–June 8

BAM's roundup of films supported by the Sundance Institute includes the documentary "Gonzo: The Life and Work of Hunter S. Thompson," directed by Alex Gibney, and "Choke," based on a novel by Chuck Palahniuk. (718-636-4100.)

ART
IT'S ACADEMIC
May 29–Sept. 7

The hundred-and-eighty-third time's a charm. The National Academy has been mounting its "Annual," an exhibition of works by non-members, since 1826. This year's invitational showcases a hundred and thirty artists, from the established (the painter David Reed, the ceramicist Betty Woodman) to the up-and-coming (the collagist Chambliss Giobbi, the painter Danielle Tegeder). (212-369-4880.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
COMING HOME
June 11

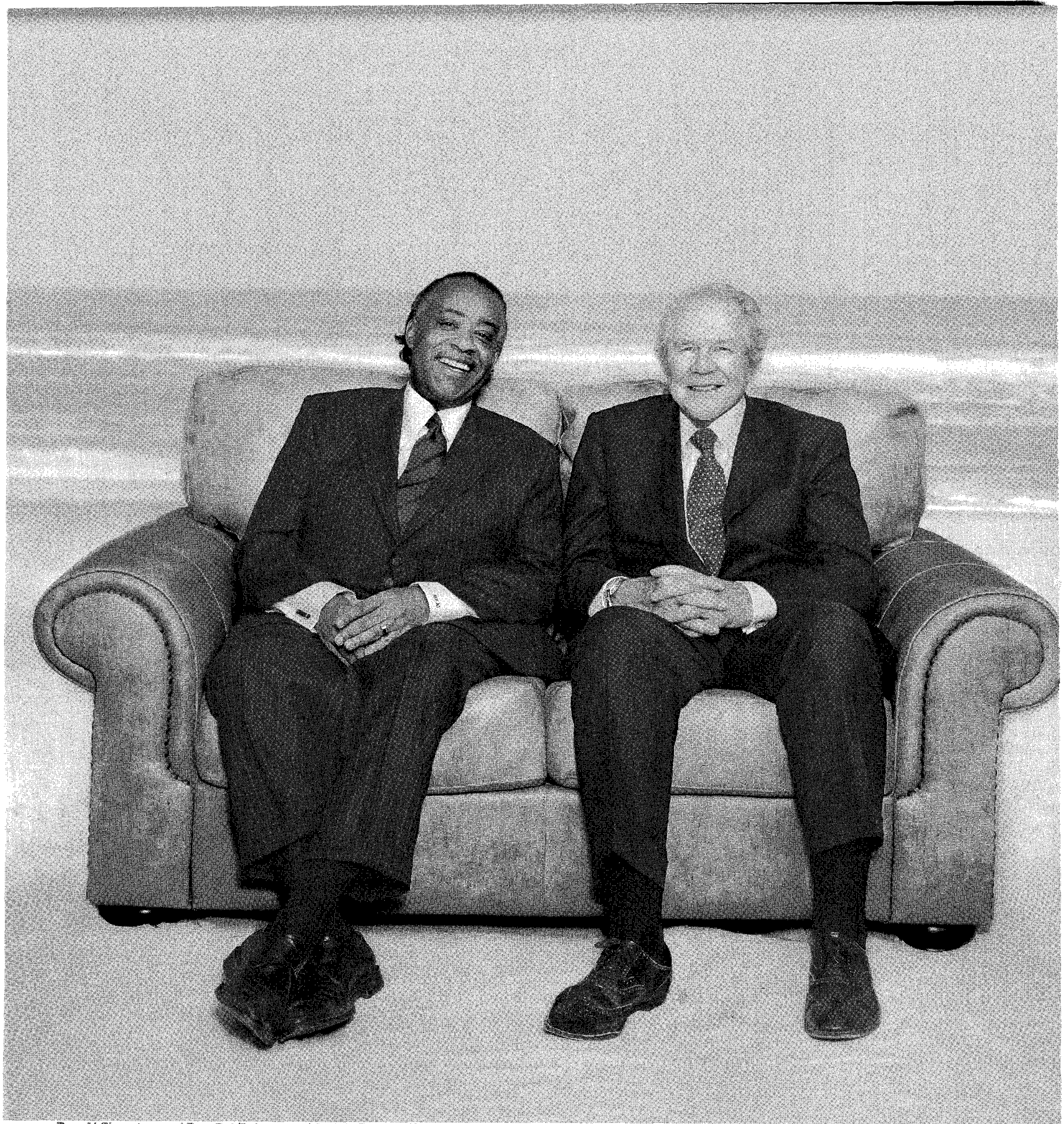
Before the construction of Lincoln Center, the New York Philharmonic was based at Carnegie Hall. The group returns to its old home to offer Carnegie's final orchestral concert of the season: Lorin Maazel's "The Ring Without Words," which innovatively condenses Wagner's mammoth cycle into a single, seventy-minute piece. (212-247-7800.)

DANCE
HIGH PRAISE
June 11, June 19, and July 10

In ballet, short men don't usually get to be the prince—they're the prince's friend. But, in its current season at the Met, American Ballet Theatre, rightly, has broken the rule for Herman Cornejo. The Argentinean dancer is scheduled to star in "Don Quixote" (June 11), "Sleeping Beauty" (June 19), and "Giselle" (July 10). (212-362-6000.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOT TIME
June 13

Central Park SummerStage ushers in the alfresco-concert season with the legendary soul and gospel vocalist Mavis Staples, who will be joined by the Bronx-born soul singer Stephanie McKay. (www.summerstage.org.)



Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Pat Robertson, Virginia Beach, VA

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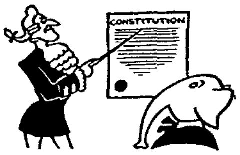
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
IN McCAIN'S COURT

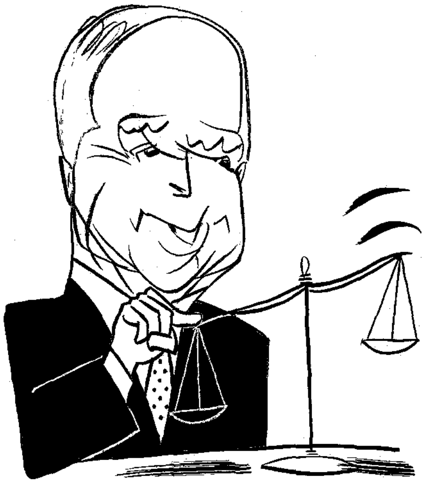


Successful politicians know how to attract attention, and how to avoid it, so it's worth noting that John McCain chose to give his speech about the future of the judiciary on May 6th, a day when the political world was preoccupied with the Democratic primaries in Indiana and North Carolina. It is significant, too, that Senator McCain spoke mainly in generalities, rather than about such specific issues as abortion, affirmative action, and the death penalty. But even if he hoped to sneak the speech past a distracted public, and have its coded references deciphered only by the activists who were its primary target, its message should not be lost on anyone. McCain plans to continue, and perhaps even accelerate, George W. Bush's conservative counter-revolution at the Supreme Court.

McCain began the speech, at Wake Forest University, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with a paean to the wisdom of the framers of the Constitution in establishing the separation of powers. "The executive, legislative, and judicial branches are often wary of one another's excesses, and they should be," he said, before adding, in a comforting way, "The system of checks and balances rarely disappoints." Still, he warned against complacency, because "there is one great exception in our day" to the smooth functioning of the separation of powers. This is surely true: the Bush Administration has sought to expand executive power in an unprecedented manner, especially with respect to the President's ability to authorize torture, ignore the Geneva conventions, and order the surveillance of citizens.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

But that was not what McCain had in mind. Instead, he pronounced that the great exception "is the common and systematic abuse of our federal courts by the people we entrust with judicial power. For decades now, some federal judges have taken it upon themselves to pronounce and rule on matters that were never intended to be heard in courts or decided by judges." This, of course, is a view functionally identical to President Bush's often expressed contempt for judges who "legislate from the bench." McCain then cited what he saw as an example of such abuse. "Sometimes the expressed will of the voters is disregarded by federal judges, as in a 2005 case concerning an aggravated murder in the state of Missouri," he said. "As you might recall, the case inspired a Supreme Court opinion that left posterity with a lengthy discourse on international law, the constitutions of other nations, the meaning of life, and 'evolving standards of decency.' These meditations were in the tradition of 'penumbras,' 'emanations,' and other airy constructs the Court has employed over the years as poor substitutes for clear and rigorous constitutional reasoning."



The giveaway here was that McCain did not reveal the subject matter of this supposed judicial outrage. The case was Roper v. Simmons, in which a seventeen-year-old boy murdered a woman after breaking into her home, and was sentenced to death. Justice Anthony M. Kennedy's opinion overturned the sentence and held that the Constitution forbids the death penalty for juvenile offenders. McCain's reference to the Court's "discourse" on the law of "other nations" refers to Kennedy's observation of the "stark reality that the United States is the only country in the world that continues to give official sanction to the juvenile death penalty." Likewise, Kennedy noted that the only other countries to execute juvenile offenders since 1990 have been China, Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. According to McCain, the United States apparently belongs on this dismal list.

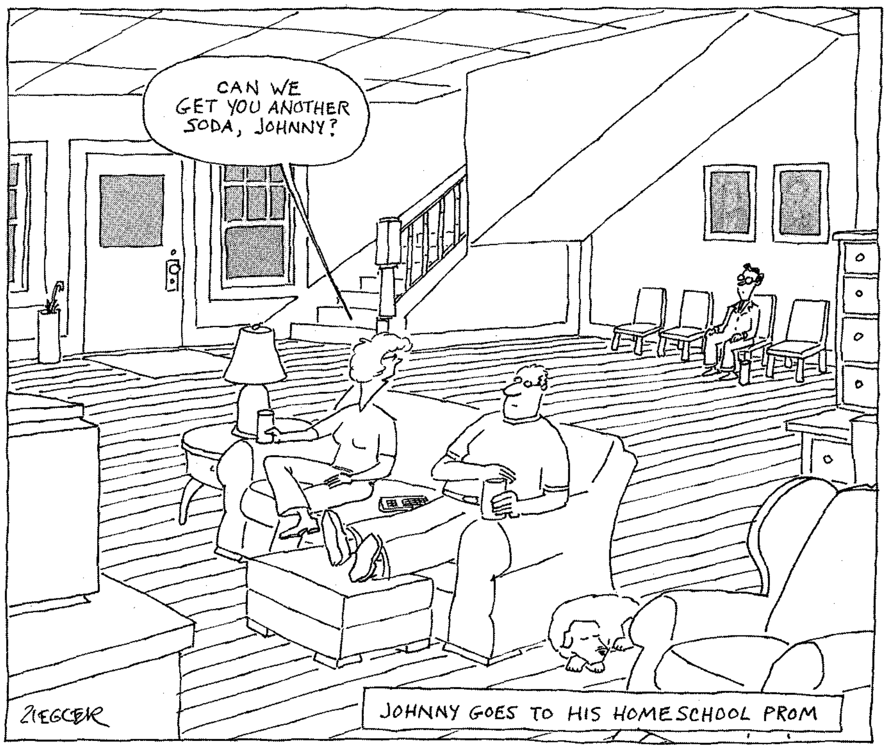
Nor were his references to penumbras

and emanations accidental. Those words come from Justice William O. Douglas's 1965 opinion for the Court in Griswold v. Connecticut, in which the Justices recognized for the first time a constitutional right to privacy, and ruled that a state could not deny married couples access to birth control. The "meaning of life" was a specific reference, too. It comes from the Court's 1992 opinion in Planned Parenthood v. Casey, which reaffirmed the central holding of Roe v. Wade, and forbade the states from banning abortion. In short, this one passage in McCain's speech amounted to a dog whistle for the right—an implicit promise that he will appoint Justices who will eliminate the right to privacy, permit states to ban abortion, and allow the execution of teen-agers.

The question, as always with McCain these days, is whether he means it. Might he really be a "maverick" when it comes to the Supreme Court? The answer, almost certainly, is no. The Senator has long touted his opposition to Roe, and has voted for every one of Bush's judicial appointments; the rhetoric of his speech shows that he is getting his advice on the Court from the most extreme elements of the conservative movement. With the general election in mind, McCain had to express himself with such elaborate circumlocution because he knows that the constituency for such far-reaching change in our constellation of rights is small, and may be shrinking. In 2004, to stoke turnout among conservatives, Karl Rove engineered the addition of anti-gay-marriage voter initiatives to the ballots in Ohio and other states; last week, though, when the California Supreme Court voted to allow gay marriage in that state, only hard-core activists were able to muster much outrage. When it comes to the Constitution, McCain is on the wrong side of the voters, and of history; thus, his obfuscations.

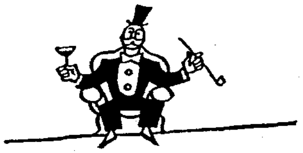
Still, the Bush-McCain agenda for the courts has made great strides. Bush's conservative appointees to the Supreme Court—John G. Roberts, Jr., and Samuel A. Alito, Jr.—have joined Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas in a phalanx that is more radical than any that the Court has seen since F.D.R.'s appointments. Those Justices allowed the New Deal to proceed, and set the stage for the noblest era in the Court's history, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, when the civil and individual rights of all citizens finally received their constitutional due. By contrast, in just three years the Roberts Court has crippled school-desegregation efforts (and hinted that affirmative action may be next); approved a federal law that bans a form of abortion; limited the reach of job-discrimination laws; and made it more difficult to challenge the mixing of church and state. It's difficult to quarrel with Justice Stephen Breyer's assessment of his new colleagues: "It is not often in the law that so few have so quickly changed so much." And more change is likely to come. John Paul Stevens, the leader of the Court's four embattled liberals, just celebrated his eighty-eighth birthday; Ruth Bader Ginsburg is seventy-five; David Souter is only sixty-eight but longs for his home in New Hampshire. For all the elisions in John McCain's speech, one unmistakable truth emerged: that the stakes in the election, for the Supreme Court and all who live by its rulings, are very, very high.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*


CAN WE GET YOU ANOTHER SODA, JOHNNY?

JOHNNY GOES TO HIS HOMESCHOOL PROM

FIELD STUDIES
POWER HOUR



Anecdotally, powerful people seem inclined to do certain things (FedEx their luggage, order off the menu, keep immaculate desks) and not to do others (place their own calls, carry cash, learn how to e-mail, admit to sleeping). To academics, one of the best indicators of a person's place in a hierarchy is his tendency toward "perspective taking"—"stepping outside of one's own experience and imagining the emotions, perceptions, and motivations of another individual," as it is defined in "Power and Perspectives Not Taken," a paper published, in 2006, in the journal *Psychological Science*. An assistant is perspective taking when he gets the boss's coffee before he asks for it; when the boss forgets to pay the assistant back the $3.75, he is not.

The hypothesis of the *Psychological Science* study was that the more power a person has, the less capacity he has to take another person's perspective. To test the theory, Joe Magee, an assistant professor at the Wagner School of Public Service, at N.Y.U., along with co-authors from Northwestern and Stanford, conducted four experiments. In one, fifty-seven undergraduates were divided into two groups, one whose members were primed to feel powerful by being asked to write about a situation in which they had

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FROM THE NEW YORKER

A FEAST OF DELICIOUS WRITING ON FOOD AND DRINK, SEASONED WITH A GENEROUS DASH OF CARTOONS.

THE MENU

WOODY ALLEN	on dieting the Dostoyevsky way
ROGER ANGELL	on the art of the Martini
JULIAN BARNES	on a gourmand's final diet
NOAH BAUMBACH	on the Zagat history of my last relationship
ANTHONY BOURDAIN	on what you don't want to know about restaurants
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ALICE McDERMOTT	on sex and ice cream
JOHN McPHEE	on Euell Gibbons, master forager
JOSEPH MITCHELL	on the beefsteak clubs of New York
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DOROTHY PARKER	on dinner conversation
S. J. PERELMAN	on a hollandaise assassin
CALVIN TRILLIN	on New York's best bagel

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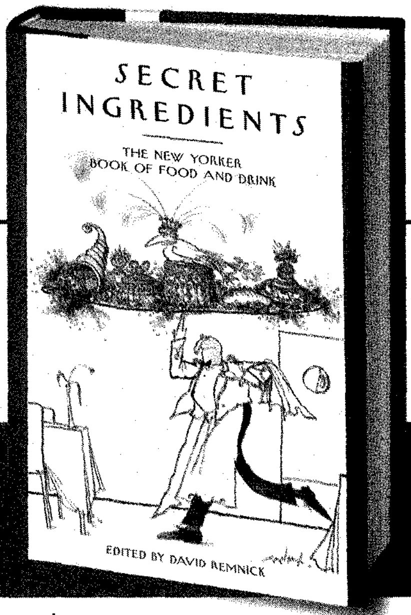

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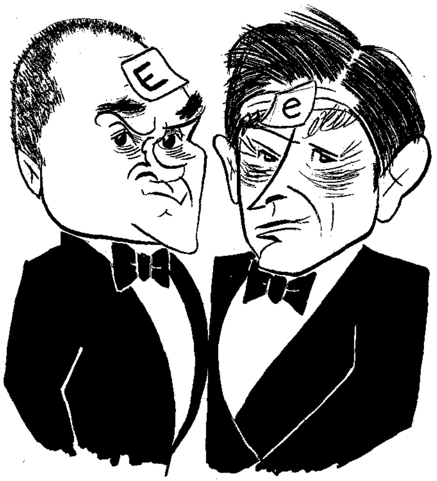
had dominion over another person. The members of the other, "low power" group were asked to write about an incident in which they had been at another person's mercy. Each participant was then presented with a set of instructions:

> Task 1. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, snap your fingers five times.
>
> Task 2. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, draw a capital *E* on your forehead with the marker provided. Don't worry, the marker is nontoxic, and we will make sure it is removed before you leave today.

There are two ways to draw the "E": with the prongs of the letter facing so that the person drawing can read it ("self-oriented"), or with the prongs pointing in the opposite direction ("other-oriented"). The researchers concluded that the high-power group was almost three times as likely as the low-power group to draw an "E" that would be illegible to anyone but themselves. (Or: $B = -1.51$, $SE = 0.76$, $p_{rep} = .88$.)



Ray Kelly and Paul Wolfowitz

An amateur researcher recently decided that the *Time* 100 banquet—champagne, lamb chops, "the most influential people in the world"—held the other night at Jazz at Lincoln Center, would be the perfect occasion for a copycat experiment. The researcher ditched the finger-snapping thing, and armed herself with a royal-blue Flair pen and a fresh pad of periwinkle-colored Post-it Notes. (It was thought that the Magic Marker approach would be pushing it.)

Liz Smith, the gossip columnist, was the first subject. Asked, during the cocktail hour, to stick a Post-it on her forehead and then to draw an "E," Smith complied, producing a sturdy, outward-facing, relatively powerless vowel. Smith was told that it suggested that she was oriented toward others. She smiled and replied, "Story of my life."

Standing alone at the bar, Paul Wolfowitz, the spit-combed former Deputy Secretary of Defense and deposed World Bank president, was hesitant about participating, but eventually he agreed, scratching out a shaky, other-oriented "e": the evening's first and only lowercase specimen. (He apparently was not demonstrating the "carryover effect," by which a person who has been stripped of influence continues to behave as if he were still in power.)

Jared Kushner, the publisher of the New York *Observer*, roped in Ray Kelly, the police commissioner, and his wife, Veronica, who were at the bar awaiting glasses of cranberry juice. Kushner brandished the Flair: an "E," facing out. The Commissioner also drew an other-oriented "E," as did Mrs. Kelly, whom he met when he was a lifeguard.

"Mine's perfect," Mrs. Kelly teased.

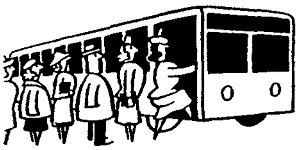
"Better swimmer, too," the Commissioner said.

It seemed odd that, in a room full of powerful people, no one was acting the way powerful people are supposed to. It was time to ask a member of this year's *Time* 100: Lloyd Blankfein, the chief executive of Goldman Sachs. Blankfein proved to be an outlier—the sole member of the sample group to yield a potent, self-oriented "E." "I have a big platform," he said, sportingly, as he smacked the Post-it on the front of his bald head.

Kristen Wiig and Amy Poehler, from "Saturday Night Live," were the only partygoers who refused to submit to the experiment. "Why would I want to do that?" Poehler asked. Joe Magee, reached on the phone later, said, "I can't believe that the 'S.N.L.' people didn't do it," but he mentioned that, in one of his "E" experiments, seven participants, mostly those from the high-power group, had walked out. He attributed the anomalously unpowerful results of the *Time* 100 trial to the use of blue Post-its. "Blue creates a negative set of emotions, and when people are experiencing these emotions they think more deliberately," he said. "If you had used red, it would have gotten at their more spontaneous inclinations."

—Lauren Collins

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
ICH BIN EIN M4



Thar she blew, the lone Citaro, the elusive, ultralong, totally Teutonic Mercedes-Benz bendy bus that for the past month or so has been confounding riders on one of three routes all over town. Sleek and gray, glinting in the sun, it turned east off Amsterdam onto 125th Street and hissed to a stop, amid a muttering on the curb of "Wow"s and "What-the"s. Today, the Citaro was the M101, which runs down Lexington Avenue. The first passenger boarded, paying with an anachronistic fistful of nickels and dimes, and proceeded toward the stern. The seats were upholstered in an abstract blue pattern cribbed, maybe, from a stewardess's scarf. The hand-grip poles were bright orange. There were three—three!—side doors. And all the signs were in German: "*Wagen halt*," "*Im Notfall 1. Griff in Pfeilrichtung drehen. 2. Tür öffnen*," "*Bitte während der Fahrt nicht mit dem Fahrer sprechen*." This did not feel like New York, and so strangers freely exchanged opinions: "This is the way to travel, man." "It's two buses in one!" "What's that, German? Cover it up. I don't wanna see it."

So: *Was ist der Bus*? Or, rather: *Was für einen Bus ist das*? New York City Transit has been subjecting the Citaro, which is big in Europe, to a forty-five-day test run to determine whether it can make it here. This prototype, then, was either a glimpse of our bus future or a one-time curiosity, a tourist in sandals and socks. The bus rides low, and it feels more spacious than the previous generation of articulated buses (the New Flyers, which, pulling into a stop behind the Citaro, suddenly look a little shabby, very American Century). And, as the driver remarked, when asked, in violation of the *nicht sprechen* rule, how it was to drive, "It's smooooth."

At Eighty-fifth and Lex, a man got on and sat in the seat by the front door. He had on a worn F.D.N.Y. cap, a windbreaker, black pants, and untied black sneakers. He began to talk very knowledgeably, in a Larry (Bud) Melman kind of voice, about upstate bus-assembly plants. Asked how he knew so much, he declared, with something like indignation, "I'm a photographer for *National Bus Trader* magazine." He explained that he'd been trying for three weeks to get a photograph of the bus, showing up at what he considered to be the most bus-photogenic stops, but his timing had been poor. Today, though, he'd come earlier, and he'd managed to get some good shots. He was hoping to get some more down at Cooper Union. "It's a nice backdrop."

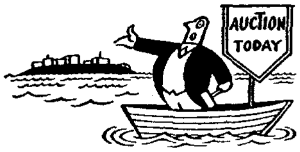
He said his name was Joseph Rebis. He is sixty years old, and an amateur bus historian, who has, in addition to the photo gig, a column in the magazine *Bus Industry* called "Looking at New York." Owing to circulatory problems, he has trouble walking and is blind in one eye. He lives alone in Brooklyn—"I'm near the Ulmer Park bus depot"—in an apartment filled with model buses, bus schedules, bus maps, bus magazines, and bus-related news clippings. "I have hundreds of thousands of bus photos," he said. He started taking pictures of buses in 1977, but he's been an enthusiast all his life. "When I was in elementary school, my mother and I would take a different bus route each weekend, to see where it went," he said. Later, they travelled around the country together, to ride buses in other cities. "My father wasn't that interested in buses," he said. His mother died years ago, but he still occasionally goes on "fan trips" to other towns: Albany, Poughkeepsie, Kingston. Sometimes bus fans buy photographs from him. "I don't get rich off it," he said.

The Citaro made its way down Lex, taking on startled passengers. "It seems like a good bus," Rebis said. He was especially impressed that Mercedes had devised a way to put seats over the wheel wells. Still, he prefers the MCI Coach models, which have reclining seats. And he loves the Department of Buses' historic fleet of Kramden-era vehicles: "You've seen those, I assume." *Natürlich.*

When the Citaro reached Cooper Square—the end of the line—the driver got off to go to the bathroom, and Rebis disembarked to snap more photos. For a magazine cover, you need a vertical shot, and so he stationed himself far enough away to get the whole bus in the frame. *National Bus Trader* was going to love this. The light wasn't quite right for a "door shot," and so, reluctantly, he gave up hope of getting one. After a moment, the driver returned and the Citaro eased away, and Rebis began the trek out to Brooklyn, to develop his roll of film.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

ON THE BLOCK
HOUSE HUNT



Richard Neutra, the architect, is not the sort of figure you think of as having much to do with artists like Damien Hirst and Jean-Michel Basquiat. But there he was last Tuesday night, at Christie's, as Lot 42, right before Hirst's "I'm in Love for the First Time" and Basquiat's "Untitled (Car Crash)." Not Neutra himself, who has been dead since 1970. It was the house he designed, in Palm Springs, in 1946, for Edgar Kaufmann, the Pittsburgh department-store owner who, a decade earlier, had commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to build Fallingwater.

In the past few years, a handful of notable pieces of modern architecture have been put up for auction. The most famous was Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, which Sotheby's sold, for seven and a half million dollars, in 2003. But these were treated as works of design, and auctioned off along with Eames chairs and Tiffany lamps. Christie's decided that the Kaufmann House, a serene, almost ethereal composition of glass walls and solid planes, was valuable enough to offer in its spring sale of postwar and contemporary art. Andrea Fiuczynski, the president of Christie's Los Angeles, and her colleague Joshua Holdeman knew that since Philip Johnson's Glass House and the Farnsworth House are both museums now, the Kaufmann House was one of the few modern American masterpieces that a private owner could still acquire. They valued it at between fifteen and twenty-five million dollars, which could buy you a more than decent four-bedroom in a good building on Fifth Avenue. The price for the Kaufmann House, Holdeman said, reflected "the public awareness of its having reached the status of being a cultural object."

There was barely standing room at Christie's on Tuesday evening. The crowd included a few people who aren't usually seen at auctions, such as Carolyn Brody, the former chairman of the National Building Museum, and Thomas Hines, Neutra's biographer. Beth Edwards Harris, an architectural historian from Los Angeles, was also there. She and her husband, Brent, bought the house from Barry Manilow in 1993. They spent five years restoring it (previous owners had built additions that all but obliterated portions of Neutra's steel-and-glass architecture). The Harrises are getting divorced, and couldn't agree on what to do with the house, so it went on the block.

Auctions tend to be carefully plotted, for dramatic highs and lows, and, after the climactic moment of a record-setting Lucian Freud (thirty-three million dollars), a few lesser works went up for sale. Then, at 8:20 P.M., Christopher Burge, the auctioneer, looked up from the podium. "I would now like to introduce Kathleen Coumou, who will conduct the auction with my assistance," he said. Only licensed real-estate brokers are legally allowed to sell houses on commission, so Coumou, a tall woman in a white suit who is a broker with Christie's realty arm, had been recruited to stand beside Burge and wield the gavel.

Burge opened the bidding at nine million dollars, and it went up fast, in increments of five hundred thousand. By the time it reached thirteen and a half million, there were two buyers left, bidding by phone. "Fourteen million," Burge said. "Fourteen and a half. Do I hear fifteen million? Fifteen million on the phone."

The room was quiet. "Fifteen million," Burge said again. "This is your last chance." Burge nodded. Coumou tapped the gavel gently, and the sale was complete. Later, the buyer—whom Christie's would not identify—agreed, in a side deal with the Harrises, to spend more than two million dollars to buy an adjacent lot that contains a small orchard. The price wasn't quite what Christie's had hoped for, but Stephen Lash, the chairman of Christie's, was happy with the sale. "It's a hell of a lot more than anything else ever sold for in Palm Springs," he said.

On the way out, someone asked Michael Ovitz, the Hollywood figure, if he had bought the house. Ovitz laughed, and shook his head. "Why would I want to do that?" he said. "I have enough trouble with my own house."

—*Paul Goldberger*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE FREE-TRADE PARADOX

All the acrimony in the primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton has disguised the fact that on most issues they're not too far apart. That's especially the case when it comes to free trade, which both Obama and Clinton have lambasted over the past few months. At times, the campaign has looked like a contest over who hates free trade more: Obama has argued that free-trade agreements like NAFTA are bought and paid for by special interests, while Clinton has emphasized the need to "stand up" to countries like China. Two weeks ago, both senators signed on as sponsors of a new bill that would effectively impose higher tariffs on China if it doesn't revalue its currency. The candidates are trying to win the favor of unions and blue-collar voters in states like Ohio and West Virginia, of course, but their positions also reflect a widespread belief that free trade with developing countries, and with China in particular, is a kind of scam perpetrated by the wealthy, who reap the benefits while ordinary Americans bear the cost.

It's an understandable view: how, after all, can it be a good thing for American workers to have to compete with people who get paid seventy cents an hour? As it happens, the negative effect of trade on American wages isn't that easy to document. The economist Paul Krugman, for instance, believes that the effect is significant, though in a recent academic paper he concluded that it was impossible to quantify. But it's safe to say that the main burden of trade-related job losses and wage declines has fallen on middle- and lower-income Americans. So standing up to China seems like a logical way to help ordinary Americans do better. But there's a problem with this approach: the very people who suffer most from free trade are often, paradoxically, among its biggest beneficiaries.

The reason for this is simple: free trade with poorer countries has a huge positive impact on the buying power of middle- and lower-income consumers—a much bigger impact than it does on the buying power of wealthier consumers. The less you make, the bigger the percentage of your spending that goes to manufactured goods—clothes, shoes, and the like—whose prices are often directly affected by free trade. The wealthier you are, the more you tend to spend on services—education, leisure, and so on—that are less subject to competition from abroad. In a recent paper on the effect of trade with China, the University of Chicago economists Christian Broda and John Romalis estimate that poor Americans devote around forty per cent more of their spending to "non-durable goods" than rich Americans do. That means that lower-income Americans get a much bigger benefit from the lower prices that trade with China has brought.

Then, too, the specific products that middle- and lower-income Americans buy are much more likely to originate in places like China than the products that wealthier Americans buy. Despite a huge increase in imports from China—they sextupled as a percentage of U.S. imports between 1990 and 2006—Chinese products are still concentrated mostly in lower-price markets. (By some estimates, Wal-Mart alone has accounted for nearly a tenth of all imports from China in recent years.) By contrast, much of what wealthier Americans buy is made in the U.S. or in high-wage countries like Germany and Switzerland. This is obvious when it comes to luxury goods—Louis Vuitton bags, Patek Philippe watches, and so on—but it's also true of many other goods, like electronics, kitchen appliances, and furniture, categories in which American and European manufacturers have continued to thrive by selling to the high-end market. According to the Yale economist Peter K. Schott, machinery and electronics products made in developed countries sell in the U.S. for four times the average price of Chinese products. And, since the late nineteen-eighties, that price gap has widened by almost forty per cent.

This may not always be the case; as China's economy continues to boom, its companies will likely move up the quality ladder and, eventually, become serious competition for high-end American and European manufacturers. But for the moment the benefits of free trade with China, at least when it comes to shopping, are concentrated overwhelmingly among average Americans. And the result is that, in the past decade, the products that they spend more on have become a lot cheaper compared to the stuff that rich people spend more on. Broda and Romalis, in their recent paper, calculate that between 1999 and 2005 alone the inflation rate for lower-income Americans was almost seven points lower than it was for the wealthiest Americans. That means that free trade with China has made average Americans, at least as consumers, much better off—in the sense that it's made their dollars go further than they otherwise would have.

Now, there's a lot that's left out of this equation, such as the fact that free trade may help richer Americans by increasing corporate profits. And cheap DVD players may not, on balance, make up for lost jobs. But the reality is that if we toughen our trade relations with China the benefits will be enjoyed by a few, since only a small percentage of Americans now work for companies that compete directly with Chinese manufacturers, while average Americans will feel the pain—in the form of higher prices—far more quickly and more directly than rich Americans will. Obama and Clinton, in their desire to help working Americans—and gain their votes—are pushing for policies that will also hurt them.

—*James Surowiecki*

ANNALS OF DRINKING

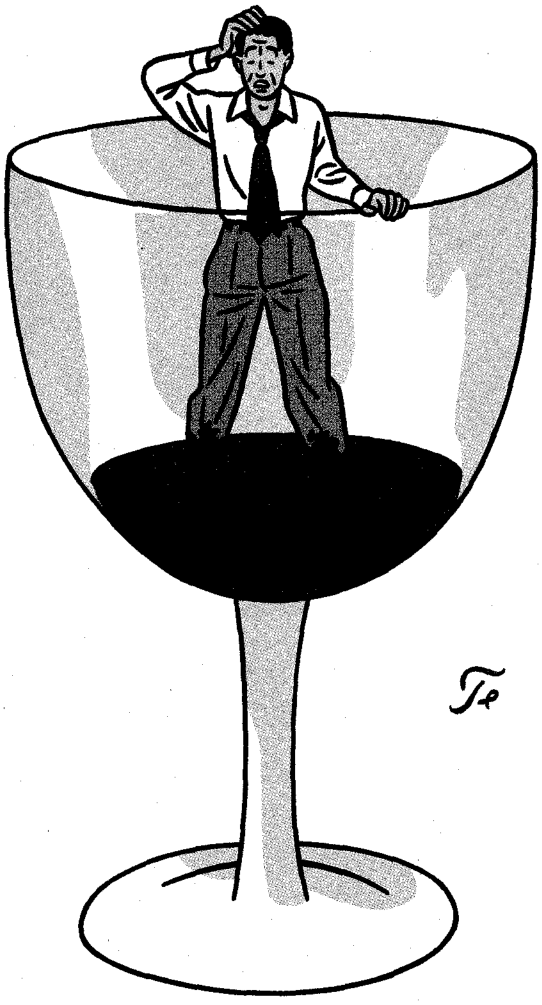
A FEW TOO MANY

Is there any hope for the hung over?

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Of the miseries regularly inflicted on humankind, some are so minor and yet, while they last, so painful that one wonders how, after all this time, a remedy cannot have been found. If scientists do not have a cure for cancer, that makes sense. But the common cold, the menstrual cramp? The hangover is another condition of this kind. It is a preventable malady: don't drink. Nevertheless, people throughout time have found what seemed to them good reason for recourse to alcohol. One attraction is alcohol's power to disinhibit—to allow us, at last, to tell off our neighbor or make an improper suggestion to his wife. Alcohol may also persuade us that we have found the truth about life, a comforting experience rarely available in the sober hour. Through the lens of alcohol, the world seems nicer. ("I drink to make other people interesting," the theatre critic George Jean Nathan used to say.) For all these reasons, drinking cheers people up. See Proverbs 31:6-7: "Give . . . wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." It works, but then, in the morning, a new misery presents itself.

A hangover peaks when alcohol that has been poured into the body is finally eliminated from it—that is, when the blood-alcohol level returns to zero. The toxin is now gone, but the damage it has done is not. By fairly common consent, a hangover will involve some combination of headache, upset stomach, thirst, food aversion, nausea, diarrhea, tremulousness, fatigue, and a general feeling of wretchedness. Scientists haven't yet found all the reasons for this network of woes, but they have proposed various causes. One is withdrawal, which would bring on the tremors and also sweating. A second factor may be dehydration. Alcohol interferes with the secretion of the hormone that inhibits urination. Hence the heavy traffic to the rest rooms at bars and parties. The resulting dehydration seems to trigger the thirst and lethargy. While that is going on, the alcohol may also be inducing hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), which converts into light-headedness and muscle weakness, the feeling that one's bones have turned to jello. Meanwhile, the body, to break down the alcohol, is releasing chemicals that may be more toxic than alcohol itself; these would result in nausea and other symptoms. Finally, the alcohol has produced inflammation, which in turn causes the white blood cells to flood the bloodstream with molecules called cytokines. Apparently, cytokines are the source of the aches and pains and lethargy that, when our bodies are attacked by a flu virus—and likewise, perhaps, by alcohol—encourage us to stay in bed rather than go to work, thereby freeing up the body's energy for use by the white cells in combatting the invader. In a series of experiments, mice that were given a cytokine inducer underwent dramatic changes. Adult males wouldn't socialize with young males new to their cage. Mothers displayed "impaired nest-building." Many people will know how these mice felt.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But hangover symptoms are not just physical; they are cognitive as well. People with hangovers show delayed reaction times and difficulties with attention, concentration, and visual-spatial perception. A group of airplane pilots given simulated flight tests after a night's drinking put in substandard performances. Similarly, automobile drivers, the morning after, get low marks on simulated road tests. Needless to say, this is a hazard, and not just for those at the wheel. There are laws against drunk driving, but not against driving with a hangover.

Hangovers also have an emotional component. Kingsley Amis, who was, in his own words, one of the foremost drunks of his time, and who wrote three books on drinking, described this phenomenon as "the metaphysical hangover": "When that ineffable compound of depression, sadness (these two are not the same), anxiety, self-hatred, sense of failure and fear for the future begins to steal over you, start telling yourself that what you have is a hangover.... You have not suffered a minor brain lesion, you are not all that bad at your job, your family and friends are not leagued in a conspiracy of barely maintained silence about what a shit you are, you have not come at last to see life as it really is." Some people are unable to convince themselves of this. Amis described the opening of Kafka's "Metamorphosis," with the hero discovering that he has been changed into a bug, as the best literary representation of a hangover.

The severity of a hangover depends, of course, on how much you drank the night before, but that is not the only determinant. What, besides alcohol, did you consume at that party? If you took other drugs as well, your hangover may be worse. And what kind of alcohol did you drink? In general, darker drinks, such as red wine and whiskey, have higher levels of congeners—impurities produced by the fermentation process, or added to enhance flavor—than do light-colored drinks such as white wine, gin, and vodka. The greater the congener content, the uglier the morning. Then there are your own characteristics—for example, your drinking pattern. Unjustly, habitually heavy drinkers seem to have milder hangovers. Your sex is also important. A woman who matches drinks with a man is going to get drunk faster than he, partly because she has less body water than he does, and less of the enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase, which breaks down alcohol. Apparently, your genes also have a vote, as does your gene pool. Almost forty per cent of East Asians have a variant, less efficient form of aldehyde dehydrogenase, another enzyme necessary for alcohol processing. Therefore, they start showing signs of trouble after just a few sips—they flush dramatically—and they get drunk fast. This is an inconvenience for some Japanese and Korean businessmen. They feel that they should drink with their Western colleagues. Then they crash to the floor and have to make awkward phone calls in the morning.

Hangovers are probably as old as alcohol use, which dates back to the Stone Age. Some anthropologists have proposed that alcohol production may have predated agriculture; in any case, it no doubt stimulated that development, because in many parts of the world the cereal harvest was largely given over to beer-making. Other prehistorians have speculated that alcohol intoxication may have been one of the baffling phenomena, like storms, dreams, and death, that propelled early societies toward organized religion. The ancient Egyptians, who, we are told, made seventeen varieties of beer, believed that their god Osiris invented this agreeable beverage. They buried their dead with supplies of beer for use in the afterlife.

Alcohol was also one of our ancestors' foremost medicines. Berton Roueché, in a 1960 article on alcohol for *The New Yorker*, quoted a prominent fifteenth-century German physician, Hieronymus Brunschwig, on the range of physical ills curable by brandy: head sores, pallor, baldness, deafness, lethargy, toothache, mouth cankers, bad breath, swollen breasts, shortwindedness, indigestion, flatulence, jaundice, dropsy, gout, bladder infections, kidney stones, fever, dog bites, and infestation with lice or fleas. Additionally, in many times and places, alcohol was one of the few safe things to drink. Water contamination is a very old problem.

Some words for hangover, like ours, refer prosaically to the cause: the Egyptians say they are "still drunk," the Japanese "two days drunk," the Chinese "drunk overnight." The Swedes get "smacked from behind." But it is in languages that describe the effects rather than the cause that we begin to see real poetic power. Salvadorans wake up "made of rubber," the French with a "wooden mouth" or a "hair ache." The Germans and the Dutch say they have a "tomcat," presumably wailing. The Poles, reportedly, experience a "howling of kittens." My favorites are the Danes, who get "carpenters in the forehead." In keeping with the saying about the Eskimos' nine words for snow, the Ukrainians have several words for hangover. And, in keeping with the Jews-don't-drink rule, Hebrew didn't even have one word until recently. Then the experts at the Academy of the Hebrew Language, in Tel Aviv, decided that such a term was needed, so they made one up: *hamarmoret*, derived from the word for fermentation. (*Hamarmoret* echoes a usage of Jeremiah's, in Lamentations 1:20, which the King James Bible translates as "My bowels are troubled.") There is a biochemical basis for Jewish abstinence. Many Jews—fifty per cent, in one estimate—carry a variant gene for alcohol dehydrogenase. Therefore, they, like the East Asians, have a low tolerance for alcohol.

As for hangover remedies, they are legion. There are certain unifying themes, however. When you ask people, worldwide, how to deal with a hangover, their first answer is usually the hair of the dog. The old faithful in this category is the Bloody Mary, but books on curing hangovers—I have read three, and that does not exhaust the list—describe more elaborate potions, often said to have been invented in places like Cap d'Antibes by bartenders with names like Jean-Marc. An English manual, Andrew Irving's

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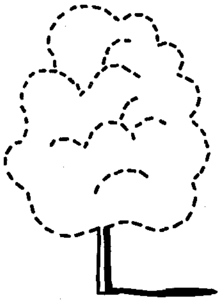
“How to Cure a Hangover” (2004), devotes almost a hundred pages to hair-of-the-dog recipes, including the Suffering Bastard (gin, brandy, lime juice, bitters, and ginger ale); the Corpse Reviver (Pernod, champagne, and lemon juice); and the Thomas Abercrombie (two Alka-Seltzers dropped into a double shot of tequila). Kingsley Amis suggests taking Underberg bitters, a highly alcoholic digestive: “The resulting mild convulsions and cries of shock are well worth witnessing. But thereafter a comforting glow supervenes.” Many people, however, simply drink some more of what they had the night before. My Ukrainian informant described his morning-after protocol for a vodka hangover as follows: “two shots of vodka, then a cigarette, then another shot of vodka.” A Japanese source suggested wearing a sake-soaked surgical mask.

Application of the hair of the dog may sound like nothing more than a way of getting yourself drunk enough so that you don’t notice you have a hangover, but, according to Wayne Jones, of the Swedish National Laboratory of Forensic Medicine, the biochemistry is probably more complicated than that. Jones’s theory is that the liver, in processing alcohol, first addresses itself to ethanol, which is the alcohol proper, and then moves on to methanol, a secondary ingredient of many wines and spirits. Because methanol breaks down into formic acid, which is highly toxic, it is during this second stage that the hangover is most crushing. If at that point you pour in more alcohol, the body will switch back to ethanol processing. This will not eliminate the hangover—the methanol (indeed, more of it now) is still waiting for you round the bend—but it delays the worst symptoms. It may also mitigate them somewhat. On the other hand, you are drunk again, which may create difficulty about going to work.



As for the non-alcoholic means of combatting hangover, these fall into three categories: before or while drinking, before bed, and the next morning. Many people advise you to eat a heavy meal, with lots of protein and fats, before or while drinking. If you can’t do that, at least drink a glass of milk. In Africa, the same purpose is served by eating peanut butter. The other most frequent before-and-during recommendation is water, lots of it. Proponents of this strategy tell you to ask for a glass of water with every drink you order, and then make yourself chug-a-lug the water before addressing the drink.

A recently favored antidote, both in Asia and in the West, is sports drinks, taken either the morning after or, more commonly, at the party itself. A fast-moving bar drink these days is Red Bull, an energy drink, mixed with vodka or with the herbal liqueur Jägermeister. (The latter cocktail is a Jag-bomb.) Some people say that the Red Bull holds the hangover at bay, but apparently its primary effect is to blunt the depressive force of alcohol—no surprise, since an eight-ounce serving of Red Bull contains more caffeine than two cans of Coke. According to fans, you can rock all night. According to Maria Lucia Souza-Formigoni, a psychobiology researcher at the Federal University of São Paolo, that’s true, and dangerous. After a few drinks with Red Bull, you’re drunk but you don’t know it, and therefore you may engage in high-risk behaviors—driving, going home with a questionable companion—rather than passing out quietly in your chair. Red Bull’s manufacturers have criticized the methodology of Souza-Formigoni’s study and have pointed out that they never condoned mixing their product with alcohol.

When you get home, is there anything you can do before going to bed? Those still able to consider such a question are advised, again, to consume buckets of water, and also to take some Vitamin C. Koreans drink a bowl of water with honey, presumably to head off the hypoglycemia. Among the young, one damage-control measure is the ancient Roman method, induced vomiting. Nic van Oudtshoorn’s “The Hangover Handbook” (1997) thoughtfully provides a recipe for an emetic: mix mustard powder with water. If you have “bed spins,” sleep with one foot on the floor.

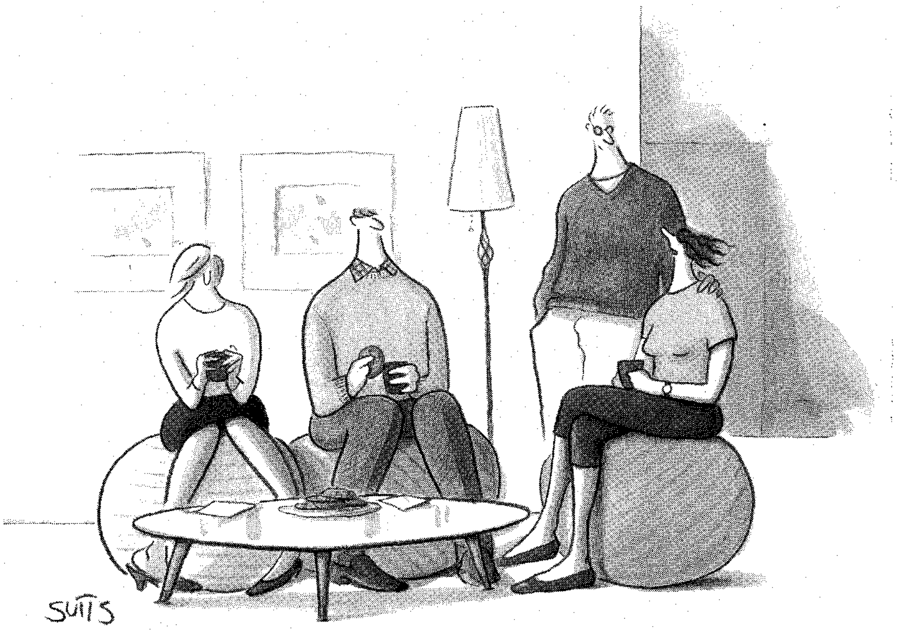
Now to the sorrows of the morning. The list-topping recommendation, apart from another go at the water cure, is the greasy-meal cure. (An American philosophy professor: “Have breakfast at Denny’s.” An English teen-ager: “Eat two McDonald’s hamburgers. They have a secret ingredient for hangovers.”) Spicy foods, especially Mexican, are popular, along with eggs, as in the Denny’s breakfast. Another egg-based cure is the prairie oyster, which involves vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, and a raw egg yolk to be consumed whole. Sugar, some say, should be reapplied. A reporter at the *Times:* “Drink a six-pack of Coke.” Others suggest fruit juice. In Scotland, there is a soft drink called Irn-Bru, described to me by a local as tasting like melted plastic. Irn-Bru is advertised to the Scots as “Your Other National Drink.” Also widely employed are milk-based drinks. Teen-agers recommend milkshakes and smoothies. My contact in Calcutta said buttermilk. “You can also pour it over your head,” he added. “Very soothing.”

Elsewhere on the international front, many people in Asia and the Near East take strong tea. The Italians and the French prefer strong coffee. (Italian informant: add lemon. French informant: add salt. Alcohol researchers: stay away from coffee—it’s a diuretic and will make you more dehydrated.) Germans eat pickled herring; the Japanese turn to pickled plums; the Vietnamese drink a wax-gourd juice. Moroccans say to chew cumin seeds; Andeans, coca leaves. Russians swear by pickle brine. An ex-Soviet ballet dancer told me, “Pickle juice or a shot of vodka or pickle juice with a shot of vodka.”

Many folk cures for hangovers are soups: *menudo* in Mexico, *mondongo* in Puerto Rico, *işkembe çorbasi* in Turkey, *patsa* in Greece, *khashi* in Georgia. The fact that all of the above involve tripe may mean something. Hungarians favor a concoction of cabbage and smoked meats, sometimes forthrightly called “hangover soup.” The Russians’ morning-after soup, *solyanka*, is, of course, made with pickle juice. The Japanese have traditionally relied on miso soup, though a while ago there was a fashion for a vegetable soup invented and marketed by one Kazu Tateishi, who claimed that it cured cancer as well as hangovers.

I read this list of food cures to Manuela Neuman, a Canadian researcher on alcohol-induced liver damage, and she laughed at only one, the six-pack of Coke. Many of the cures probably work, she said, on the same distraction principle as the hair of the dog: “Take the spicy foods, for example. They divert the body's attention away from coping with the alcohol to coping with the spices, which are also a toxin. So you have new problems—with your stomach, with your esophagus, with your respiration—rather than the problem with the headache, or that you are going to the washroom every five minutes." The high-fat and high-protein meals operate in the same way, she said. The body turns to the food and forgets about the alcohol for the time being, thus delaying the hangover and possibly alleviating it. As for the differences among the many food recommendations, Neuman said that any country's hangover cure, like the rest of its cultural practices, is an adaptation to the environment. Chilies are readily available in Mexico, peanut butter in Africa. People use what they have. Neuman also pointed out that local cures will reflect the properties of local brews. If Russians favor pickle juice, they are probably right to, because their drink is vodka: "Vodka is a very pure alcohol. It doesn't have the congeners that you find, for example, in whiskey in North America. The congeners are also toxic, independent of alcohol, and will have their own effects. With vodka you are just going to have pure-alcohol effects, and one of the most important of those is dehydration. The Russians drink a lot of water with their vodka, and that combats the dehydration. The pickle brine will have the same effect. It's salty, so they'll drink more water, and that's what they need."

Many hangover cures—the soups, the greasy breakfast—are comfort foods, and that, apart from any sworn-by ingredients, may be their chief therapeutic property, but some other remedies sound as though they were devised by the witches in "Macbeth." Kingsley Amis recommended a mixture of Bovril and vodka. There is also a burnt-toast cure. Such items suggest that what some hungover people are seeking is not so much relief as *atonement*. The same can be said of certain non-food recommendations, such as exercise. One source says that you should do a forty-minute workout, another that you should run six miles—activities that may have little attraction for the hung over. Additional procedures said to be effective are an intravenous saline drip and kidney dialysis, which, apart from their lack of appeal, are not readily available.



"How long have we been sitting on balls, Jon?"

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There are other non-ingested remedies. Amazon will sell you a refrigeratable eye mask, an aromatherapy inhaler, and a vinyl statue of St. Vivian, said to be the patron saint of the hung over. She comes with a stand and a special prayer.

The most widely used over-the-counter remedy is no doubt aspirin. Advil, or ibuprofen, and Alka-Seltzer—there is a special formula for hangovers, Alka-Seltzer Wake-Up Call—are probably close runners-up. (Tylenol, or acetaminophen, should not be used, because alcohol increases its toxicity to the liver.) Also commonly recommended are Vitamin C and B-complex vitamins. But those are almost home remedies. In recent years, pharmaceutical companies have come up with more specialized formulas: Chaser, NoHang, BoozEase, PartySmart, Sob'r-K HangoverStopper, Hangover Prevention Formula, and so on. In some of these, such as Sob'r-K and Chaser, the primary ingredient is carbon, which, according to the manufacturers, soaks up toxins. Others are herbal compounds, featuring such ingredients as ginseng, milk thistle, borage, and extracts of prickly pear, artichoke, and guava leaf. These and other O.T.C. remedies aim to boost biochemicals that help the body deal with toxins. A few remedies have scientific backing. Manuela Neuman, in lab tests, found that milk-thistle extract, which is an ingredient in NoHang and Hangover Helper, does protect cells from damage by alcohol. A research team headed by Jeffrey Wiese, of Tulane University, tested prickly-pear extract, the key ingredient in Hangover Prevention Formula, on human subjects and found significant improvement with the nausea, dry mouth, and food aversion but not with other, more common symptoms, such as headache.

Five years ago, there was a flurry in the press over a new O.T.C. remedy called RU-21 (i.e., Are you twenty-one?). According to the reports, this wonder drug was the product of twenty-five years of painstaking research by the Russian Academy of Sciences, which developed it for K.G.B. agents who wanted to stay sober while getting their contacts drunk and prying information out of them. During the Cold War, we were told, the formula was a state secret, but in 1999 it was declassified. Now it was ours! "HERE'S ONE COMMUNIST PLOT AMERICANS CAN REALLY GET BEHIND," the headline in the Washington *Post* said. "BOTTOMS UP TO OUR BUDDIES IN RUSSIA," the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* said. The literature on RU-21 was mysterious, however. If the formula was developed to keep your head clear, how come so many reports said that it didn't suppress the effects of alcohol? Clearly, it couldn't work both ways. When I put this question to Emil Chiaberi, a co-founder of RU-21's manufacturer, Spirit Sciences, in California, he answered, "No, no, no. It is true that succinic acid"—a key ingredient of RU-21—"was tested at the Russian Academy of Sciences, including secret laboratories that worked for the K.G.B. But it didn't do what they wanted. It didn't keep people sober, and so it never made it with the K.G.B. men. Actually, it does improve your condition a little. In Russia, I've seen people falling under the table plenty of times—they drink differently over there—and if they took a few of these pills they were able to get up and walk around, and maybe have a couple more drinks. But no, what those scientists discovered, really by accident, was a way to prevent hangover." (Like many other O.T.C. remedies, RU-21 is best taken before or while drinking, not the next morning.) Asians love the product, Chiaberi says. "It flies off the shelves there." In the United States, it is big with the Hollywood set: "For every film festival—Sundance, the Toronto Film Festival—we get calls asking us to send them RU-21 for parties. So it has that glamour thing."

Most cures for hangover—indeed, most statements about hangover—have not been tested. Jeffrey Wiese and his colleagues, in a 2000 article in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, reported that in the preceding thirty-five years more than forty-seven hundred articles on alcohol intoxication had been published, but that only a hundred and eight of these dealt with hangover. There may be more information on hangover cures in college newspapers—a rich source—than in the scientific literature. And the research that has been published is often weak. A team of scientists attempting to review the literature on hangover cures were able to assemble only fifteen articles, and then they had to throw out all but eight on methodological grounds. There have been more studies in recent years, but historically this is not a subject that has captured scientists' hearts.

Which is curious, because anyone who discovered a widely effective hangover cure would make a great deal of money. Doing the research is hard, though. Lab tests with cell samples are relatively simple to conduct, as are tests with animals, some of which have been done. In one experiment, with a number of rats suffering from artificially induced hangovers, ninety per cent of the animals died, but in a group that was first given Vitamins B and C, together with cysteine, an amino acid contained in some O.T.C. remedies, there were no deaths. (Somehow this is not reassuring.) The acid test, however, is in clinical trials, with human beings, and these are complicated. Basically, what you have to do is give a group of people a lot to drink, apply the remedy in question, and then, the next morning, score them on a number of measures in comparison with people who consumed the same amount of alcohol without the remedy. But there are many factors that you have to control for: the sex of the subjects; their general health; their family history; their past experience with alcohol; the type of alcohol you give them; the amount of food and water they consume before, during, and after; and the circumstances under which they drink, among other variables. (Wiese and his colleagues, in their prickly-pear experiment, provided music so that the subjects could dance, as at a party.) Ideally, there should also be a large sample—many subjects.

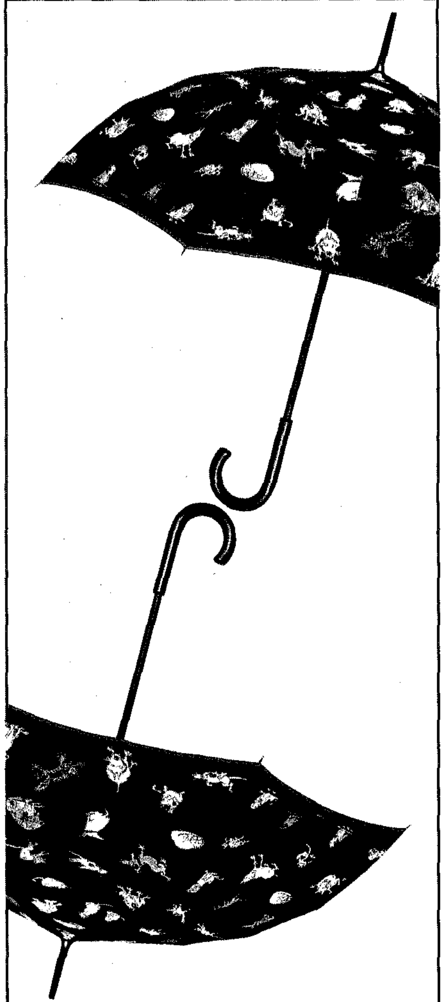
"Your prognosis is tied to the outcome of the election."

All that costs money, and researchers do not pay out of pocket. They depend on funding institutions—typically, universities, government agencies, and foundations. With all those bodies, a grant has to be O.K.'d by an ethics committee, and such committees' ethics may stop short of getting people drunk. For one thing, they are afraid that the subjects will hurt themselves. (All the studies I read specified that the subjects were sent home by taxi or limousine after their contribution to science.) Furthermore, many people believe that alcohol abusers *should* suffer the next morning—that this is a useful deterrent. Robert Lindsey, the president of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, told me that he wasn't sure about that. His objection to hangover-cure research was simply that it was a misuse of resources: "Fifteen million people in this country are alcohol-dependent. That's a staggering number! They need help: not with hangovers but with the cause of hangovers—alcohol addiction." Robert Swift, an alcohol researcher who teaches at Brown University, counters that if scientists, through research, could provide the public with better information on the cognitive impairments involved in hangover, we might be able to prevent accidents. He compares the situation to the campaigns against distributing condoms, on the ground that this would increase promiscuity. In fact, the research has shown that free condoms did not have that effect. What they did was cut down on unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease.

Manufacturers of O.T.C. remedies are sensitive to the argument that they are enablers, and their literature often warns against heavy drinking. The message may be unashamedly mixed, however. The makers of NoHang, on their Web page, say what your mother would: "It is recommended that you drink moderately and responsibly." At the same time, they tell you that with NoHang "you can drink the night away." They list the different packages in which their product can be bought: the Bender (twelve tablets), the Party Animal (twenty-four), the It's Noon Somewhere (forty-eight). Among the testimonials they publish is one by "Chad S," from Chicago: "After getting torn up all day on Saturday, I woke up Sunday morning completely hangover-free. I must have had like twenty drinks." Researchers address the moral issue less hypocritically. Wiese and his colleagues describe the damage done by hangovers—according to their figures, the cost to the U.S. economy, in absenteeism and poor job performance, is a hundred and forty-eight billion dollars a year (other estimates are far lower, but still substantial)—and they mention the tests with the airplane pilots, guaranteed to scare anyone. They also say that there is no experimental evidence indicating that hangover relief encourages further drinking. (Nor, they might have added, have there been any firm findings on this matter.) Manuela Neuman, more philosophically, says that some people, now and then, are going to drink too much, no matter what you tell them, and that we should try to relieve the suffering caused thereby. Such reasoning seems to have cut no ice with funding institutions. Of the meagre research I have read in support of various cures, all was paid for, at least in part, by pharmaceutical companies.

A truly successful hangover cure is probably going to be slow in coming. In the meantime, however, it is not easy to sympathize with the alcohol disciplinarians, so numerous, for example, in the United States. They seem to lack a sense of humor and, above all, the tragic sense of life. They appear not to know that many people have a lot that they'd like to forget. In the words of the English aphorist William Bolitho, "The shortest way out of Manchester is . . . a bottle of Gordon's gin," and if that relief is temporary the reformers would be hard put to offer a more lasting solution. Also questionable is the moral emphasis of the temperance folk, their belief that drinking is a lapse, a sin, as if getting to work on time, or living a hundred years, were the crown of life. They forget alcohol's relationship to camaraderie, sharing, toasts. Those, too, are moral matters. Even hangovers are related to social comforts. Alcohol investigators describe the bad things that people do on the morning after. According to Genevieve Ames and her research team at the Prevention Research Center, in Berkeley, hungover assembly-line workers are more likely to be criticized by their supervisors, to have disagreements with their co-workers, and to feel lousy. Apart from telling us what we already know, such findings are incomplete, because they do not talk about the jokes around the water cooler—the fellowship, the badge of honor. Yes, there are safer ways of gaining honor, but how available are they to most people?

Outside the United States, there is less finger-wagging. British writers, if they recommend a cure, will occasionally say that it makes you feel good enough to go out and have another drink. They are also more likely to tell you about the health benefits of moderate drinking—how it lowers one's risk of heart disease, Alzheimer's, and so on. English fiction tends to portray drinking as a matter of getting through the day, often quite acceptably. In P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster series, a hangover is the occasion of a happy event, Bertie's hiring of Jeeves. Bertie, after "a late evening," is lying on the couch in agony when Jeeves rings his doorbell. " 'I was sent by the agency, sir,' he said. 'I was given to understand that you required a valet.' " Bertie says he would have preferred a mortician. Jeeves takes one look at Bertie, brushes past him, and vanishes into the kitchen, from which he emerges a moment later with a glass on a tray. It contains a prairie oyster. Bertie continues, "I would have clutched at anything that looked like a life-line that morning. I swallowed the stuff. For a moment I felt as if somebody . . . was strolling down my throat with a lighted torch, and then everything seemed suddenly to get all right. The sun shone in through the window; birds twittered in the tree-tops; and, generally speaking, hope dawned once more. 'You're engaged,' I said." Here the hangover is a comedy, or at least a fact of life. So it has been, probably, since the Stone Age, and so it is likely to be for a while yet. ◆



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OVER, AROUND, AND THROUGH, YOUR HIGHNESS

BY WOODY ALLEN

Dining alone at the Ivy, in Beverly Hills, renders a suit mighty vulnerable, especially if you happen to be one canonized with sufficient juice to green-light a project. That's why when the waiter motored over and whispered that the blond little amuse-bouche whose ear I was planning to blow into over gumbo had phoned with an onset of the rams I ordered a quick salad and submerged my visage protectively behind a copy of *The Hollywood Reporter.* Scarcely had I melded into an article about Universal dickering for the film rights to "Mourning Becomes Electra on Ice" when I became aware of a hyphenate-shaped *nuage* adumbrating my roll basket. Glancing up, I came vis-à-vis with the corpulent scrivener slash director whom I dimly recognized as Hugh Forcemeat, a weaver of thirty-five-millimetre hallucinations that our studio had taken a flyer with several years ago, when we hired him to punch up "Psychotic Zombies of the Moon," our sequel to "Buddenbrooks." More lately, I knew, he'd devolved to the B-list, thanks to a series of screenplays that resulted in product shipped directly to Forest Lawn. Now he existed exclusively via a scholarship good for four Benjamins every Tuesday, which he could siphon simply by answering the questions Did you work last week? Did you look for work?

"Just the man I wanna see," he said, swimming into the vacant space at my booth like a cuttlefish.

"If it's about the all-midget remake of 'Shane,' our production plate's a little full," I said, recalling a treatment recently folded into a taco shell and smuggled past security with some Mexican takeout.

"No, no." He waved me off. "What I'm here to pitch is a fail-safe little afflatus absolutely guaranteed to rack up box-office numerals measurable only through the Hubble telescope. I was going to produce it myself at Sundance as an indie for forty thousand bucks, but I figured for another sixty-eight million I could do it union."

Mindful, as a Hollywood executive, that a megahit allowed to slip through the fingers could result in a severance package consisting exclusively of a single crystal of anthracite, I granted Forcemeat a moment to spin his contrivance.

"What's the greatest love story of the twentieth century?" he asked, his eyes ablaze and so bloodshot they cast a pink glow on my sweater.

"There's so many," I suggested. "Anything from Scott and Zelda to Joe D. and Marilyn. Also J.F.K. and Jackie, not to mention Bonnie and Clyde."

"May I just throw in the Duke and Duchess of Windsor?" he asked, commandeering my Perrier to down two pills of the size used to dope thoroughbreds.

"Jackpot!" I yelped. Here was an idea that not only had Oscar written all over it but could rescue the studio from the Biblical flood of ruby ink irritating our ledgers from epics like "A Cretin's Christmas" and "Brother Sebastian's Jowls." "I see Edward VIII smitten," I enthused. "The agonizing decision of whether or not to give up the throne for an American divorcée. Is his duty to his countrymen or to his heart?" Ordering a napkin with a contract on it that the Ivy keeps for just such spontaneous brainchildren, I fumbled for my Montblanc. "I have the copy line," I squealed. "Get this: 'Cupid Versus the Crown.' "

"Except we're going to leave all that stuff out," Forcemeat said, loosening the cap on some organic nostrum he toted and swigging it. "But don't worry, boychick, that's not the real kernel of the story." He groped for a few guacamole-stained notes in his pants pocket. "I've fabricated some twists and patter limning a narrative that won't step on the toes of the other moguls who actually own the rights and would no doubt respond with what my lawyer, Nolan Contendere, says is a slam-dunk legal action."

"Twists? Patter?" I bleated.

"Lamp this," Forcemeat said, thrusting his presentation into my hands.

I peeked down and read:

FADE IN: *A huge mansion in Belgravia. Its lavish appointments suggest breeding and refinement. The grand marble staircase hung with tapestries, the priceless Aubusson carpets, the collection of Tang- and Sung-dynasty vases give the place a cozy, lived-in look. We are in the pied-à-terre of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Camera dollies forward to find the Duchess bent over the stove, recipe in hand, sautéing some money. The Duke is resting in the study, having just been measured by his tailor for a vicuña umbrella.*

DUCHESS: Oh, darling, isn't our life perfection? Ever since you gave two weeks' notice as head honcho of Wales, resulting in our scandalous nuptials, it's been an endless cycle of yachting, foxhunting, and dinner engagements. By the way, if Hitler calls, tell him he can find those party favors he liked at Harrods.

DUKE (*glumly*): Umm. Sure.

DUCHESS: Hey, what is it with you lately, Blue Eyes? You've been awash in melancholy for days. Don't tell me you've never completely gotten over the end of truffle season?

DUKE (*tapping a cigarette gravely on his emerald-encrusted case*): I was at my club the other morning fressing up some beluga when for some reason I happened to notice the members' neckties. The knots that in the past had always seemed quite adequate to me suddenly, for some strange reason, appeared—how shall I put it—rather meagre. I tried to check the bespoke paisley I had on, to see if my own knot was as insubstantial and irrationally laced as theirs, but no matter how far I thrust my chin into my chest my nose obstructed the view. Distraught, I bolted to the mirror, looked between the points of my collar, and realized that my life was a sham.

DUCHESS: But, Edward, the four-in-hand has been the choice of English gentlemen since Hector was a pup. If I'm not mistaken, directions for its proper making are included in the Magna Carter.

DUKE: Suddenly the room began to spin. I broke into a sweat and tore off my necktie, whereupon two gentlemen lifted me up by the arms and deposited me on the curb, as the dining room has a strict dress code.

DUCHESS: Hmm. Now that you mention it, I believe Adler, an associate of Freud's, speaks of the panic that some men experience when the under strand of the necktie hangs down longer than the wider outer strand. He links it to fear of castration.

DUKE (*muttering*): I must develop a new knot. Something fuller and more symmetrical. Euclid—must study Euclid . . .

I looked up from Forcemeat's little inspiration and, divining where his premise was heading, began to experience a slight stiffening in my spine not unlike the sensation one gets from a dart tipped with curare.

"I see by the dazed expression on your face that you're hooked," he said, fixing me with the febrile intensity one sees in photos of the Mahdi. Jamming page 2 into my hand, he exhorted me on.

CUT TO MONTHS LATER: *A montage of the Duke at work fashioning a variety of knots but without success. The Duchess, trying to busy herself, is practicing the Watusi from a dance diagram laid on the floor.*

DUKE: I'm lost! I'm lost! For a while I thought the problem resided in the fabric, and so I cast aside all my silk and knit neckwear and had a few ties custom-made of vulcanized rubber. But when I wore one the knot was so bulbous that Jessica Mitford thought I had a goitre. I even employed a group of Portuguese fishermen who handweave nets to fashion something for me, but their cravat proved insufficiently stylish, although while strolling by the Thames I did manage to catch four salmon.

DUCHESS: Albert Einstein phoned and said he could try to show you how to make a bow tie, but since you have limited background in quantum mechanics it probably would not come out. He suggested you try a clip-on, and said that learning to use it would be simpler, especially with your skill in sailing.

DUKE: Doesn't he know my religion forbids that? If I were to wear a clip-on I couldn't be buried in a Christian cemetery.

Lowering the text, my hypothalamus engulfed by a tsunami of melatonin, I sensed it was time to disengage. Snapping for the check, I began to bail. "I'm a little late," I offered. "A family of four is being embalmed on one of our reality shows, and I have to check their makeup."

Forcemeat pleaded that I skim ahead to his climax, which he modestly likened to the last act of "King Lear."

"It's a year later," he babbled, blocking my egress and grasping my lapels. "The Duke, excavating in Alexandria, comes upon a fragment of papyrus by Isosceles, which gives him a clue to the shape of the knot he's been seeking. Later, at the Duke's club, his hoity-toity chums are giving him the business. 'This lump,' says one, pointing to Edward's tie. 'This humongous triangle, this *Windsor* knot—' He gives a big wink, and the joint goes up for grabs, guffawing, except for one member, who's moved and writes a strong defense of the Duke's tie. Of course, it is Bertrand Russell. P.S. I already spoke to Leo DiCaprio about the role of Lord Russell, and he loves the idea, provided we can shoot the whole picture at Caesars Palace. And now we fade to black—"

It was at this point that I, too, faded to black. While unconscious, I was told afterward, two men in spotless white appeared, bearing extensive psychiatric credentials and lepidopterology trapping equipment, and bundled Forcemeat into a waiting van. Greenlighting a project like that would have led to too many questions, like: Did you work this week? Did you look for work? ♦

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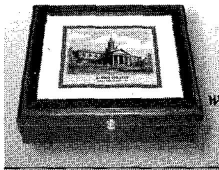

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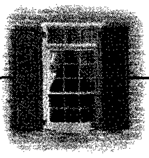

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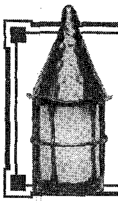

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SHADOW PLAYER

The provocations of Paul Chan.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Two weeks before the opening of Paul Chan's current exhibition at the New Museum of contemporary art, a mysterious poster began appearing on walls and billboards in downtown Manhattan. In black type on a white background, it read:

You ~~think~~
~~things~~ will ~~end.~~
~~And that will~~ be the
opening.

~~I want you to know~~
~~things don't think~~ to
end.
~~And that is~~
the promise and the
threat.

The brief text, composed by Chan, could be read with or without the words that were struck out. Either way, it seemed to carry a message that was ambiguous, elusive, and somewhat ominous, and in this sense it accurately reflected the body of work—in video animations and documentaries, drawings, photographs, and other media—that has made Chan one of the more closely watched artists of his generation.

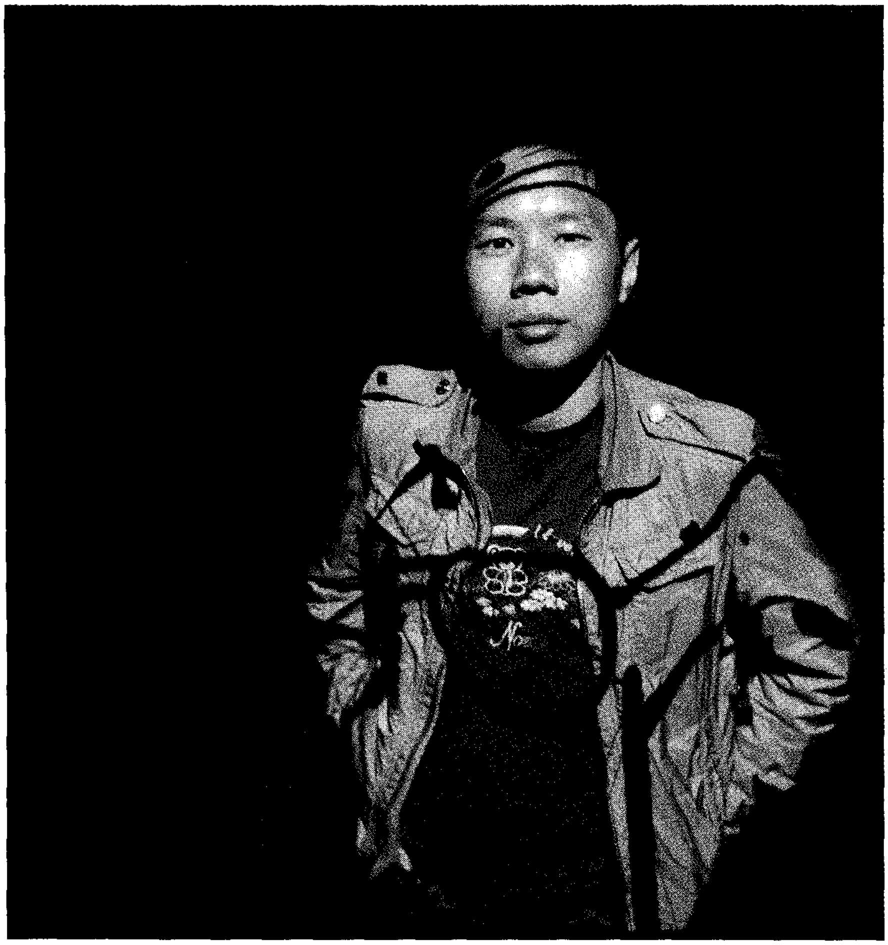
Thirty-five years old and a bit under five and a half feet tall, Chan himself can be quite elusive, although he tries hard not to be. Many things amuse him, and he is attuned to the enriching absurdities of the moment. Not long ago, when my wife and I were having dinner with him at a downtown restaurant, the co-owner came over and asked whether he was our son. Chan looked up at her and nodded guilelessly. She persisted: Was he in college? What was he studying? "I'm studying to be an artist," he said, not quite untruthfully.

The exhibition, called "The 7 ~~Lights~~," will be on view here through June 29th. It is Chan's first one-man exhibition in a New York museum, and only his second solo appearance here since he showed at the Greene Naftali Gallery in 2004. His name still draws a blank among some art-world professionals, but important collectors, including Dakis Joannou and David Teiger, have bought his work, and it is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, and the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis. "His work is really about dissolution," Kathy Hallbreich, the new associate director of MOMA, said recently. "Dissolution of faith, dissolution of the worlds we know.... He has figured out a way to make the perils of our time accessible."

Most of the darkened space on the New Museum's third floor is devoted to his shadow plays ("Lights") of moving computer-generated images, all of which date from the past three years. (When I asked him why the word "Lights" was struck out in the title, he said, "Because what I'm showing are projections of light and shadows, and shadows are light that is struck out.") There are six projections in the title series, each soundless and lasting fourteen minutes; a seventh takes the form of abstract drawings on music manuscript paper. They all begin with a flood of warm colors, reds and yellows, which gradually give way to black, silhouetted images. In "1st ~~Light~~," the initial images include a telephone pole, overhead wires, and flocks of birds; into this space, a minute later, small objects slowly rise—cell phones, eyeglasses, folding chairs, an iPod—defying gravity and breaking apart. Larger objects float up: a police car, a bicycle, and then, shockingly, a body hurtles downward. More human figures fall, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs or groups, travelling much faster than the rising objects, until color returns in washes of deep blue and violet and the cycle begins anew.

One thinks inevitably of September 11th. Also the Apocalypse and the Rapture, but with a twist—God welcoming our consumer goods while sending us to the Other Place. When I asked Chan about this, he grinned and said, "Given that what I like is to turn things upside down, I thought it might be more interesting if Jesus didn't take anyone, but only took our favorite things." Quasi-religious content, pushed by darker impulses, is a recurrent factor in Chan's work. "Paul is not religious," Massimiliano Gioni, the New Museum curator who installed the show, says, "but there is a spiritual tension in all his work, and a troubled relationship with religion." Ever since his student days, Chan has been engaged in social activism as well as in art, even while insisting, not entirely persuasively, that the two are not only separate but incompatible: politics is about concentrating power, he says, and art is about dispersing it. Certain works of art resist our attempts to interpret or explain them, Chan believes, and that resistance—what he calls their "articulate speechlessness"—is what gives them enduring power.

More than a thousand people came to the opening of Chan's New Museum show, on April 8th. His mother and sister had both flown in from Chicago, and Marlo Poras, the young documentary filmmaker with whom he lives, had arrived the night before from Beijing, where she was researching a new film. The opening had the festive, excited feeling of an art-world event, a confirmation. Chan, who is rarely seen in anything more formal than jeans and a T-shirt, had dressed for the occasion in a dark-blue pin-striped suit made to order by a downtown tailor (Lord Willy's) he'd heard about from a friend. "I'm strangely calm," he told me, laughing. "But then I don't know when I'm not strangely calm."



Chan says his art aims for "articulate speechlessness." Photograph by Steve Pyke.

Paul Chan first experienced the articulate speechlessness of great art in his freshman year at Omaha North High School. His family had moved to Omaha when he was eight. Trying to impress a girl in the senior class, he took her to see a new theatre company in town, which was doing three short plays by Samuel Beckett. "Even now, talking to you, I can feel the shiver of it," he said. "I didn't even pretend to understand it. I probably still don't understand it. But the combination of the cadence and the rhythms of the words coming at you, and the space and the lighting—it encompassed a kind of netherworld that I had never imagined, and couldn't imagine anyone imagining. I was just gone."

To get to this point, Chan had already bridged some impressive distances. Born in Hong Kong in 1973, when it was still a British Crown Colony, he had spent his early years living in a two-room apartment with his mother, who taught high-school biology; his father, a former teacher who had stopped working; his paternal grandfather; his "auntie"; and his sister, Anna, who was eighteen months younger than Paul but whom he always thought of as being older, because she took care of him. "I was sick and clumsy," he remembers. "I fell a lot—I had trouble with gravity." He was also severely asthmatic. When the Chans immigrated to the United States, in 1981, it was mainly to find a healthier environment for Paul.

The family ran what Paul calls "a typical Midwestern Chinese restaurant" in Omaha. He adjusted easily to American life. He had learned English in Hong Kong and had watched a lot of American TV, so he felt at home in the culture; as his asthma cleared up, he found that he could play football and basketball and other sports. "My mom became an avid sports fan. We lived in a lower-middle-class suburb in Omaha, and if you said 'How about the Cowboys?' you were O.K."

When it came time for college, he chose the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but not because he had decided to be an artist. "I assumed an art school would give me the kind of freedom I needed to learn at my own pace, and I guessed right," he said. "I took a lot of non-art courses. I studied video production and journalism." On his own, he read a lot, something he had been doing since his Beckett epiphany. Beckett had led him to Eugène Ionesco and Edward Albee, and to Gertrude Stein, and eventually to twentieth-century European literary, social, and political theorists: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin,

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Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others. "It was just reckless self-education," he told me. "Part of the pleasure of reading Derrida is precisely that I do not have to understand him. Comprehension is not the game. I don't care what he thinks he's saying—I want to read word for word, and pay attention so much that I begin to hallucinate. Which I think is a very reckless way of reading, but for me a productive one."

In his last two years at the Art Institute, he began to concentrate on video. "It was the beginning of the global political landscape," he said, "and the personal computer was getting powerful enough to edit video at home." Chan's technical skills were immediately evident. When he graduated, in 1996, he was offered a teaching position in the Art Institute's video department, and that led, two years later, to a somewhat similar job at Fordham University, in New York.

After work, at Fordham or alone in his rented room in Chelsea, he made single-channel videos, which were more attuned to polemics than to art. "All you needed to do that was a video camera and a computer," he said. He had a girlfriend, and he was discovering the art world, going to galleries and museums and alternative spaces and performances. "In a way, I felt like king of the hill," he remembers. "I was young, I was teaching, I was living in New York, I'd started showing in small film and video festivals." But Norman Cowie, an assistant professor in the Fordham communications department and a close friend, kept pushing him to go back to school. There was very little money available for video artists, and, as Cowie knew, without a master's degree there was no hope of getting a decent teaching job. Bard College, two hours north of the city, offered an excellent M.F.A. program in three summer sessions; Chan applied to Bard, and started there in the summer of 2000.

The program at Bard was interdisciplinary: painting and sculpture, film and video, creative writing, music, and photography. Chan says the most useful advice he received came during a conversation with the artist Amy Sillman, who was (and still is) on the faculty. "Paul," she told him, "it's clear that you're very bright, but dumb people make great work, too." This was the first time he'd realized that "the intellect had no priority, that there are different senses involved when you make forms," he said. "At the time, I thought you could think it through."

In his three summers at Bard, Chan drew and animated, on his computer, thousands of images for a video that would become his first important art work. The idea for this had been germinating since his student days in Chicago, when he discovered the drawings and writings of a Chicago janitor and outsider artist named Henry Darger. In a fifteen-thousand-page manuscript discovered just before his death, in 1973, Darger had imagined, in words and accompanying watercolors, a fantasy world of prepubescent girls—often naked or semi-naked—whose leaders mount a rebellion against a regime of child slavery imposed on them by adults. "It threw me for a loop," Chan remembers, "all those naked bodies and physical and metaphysical violence." He added, "It didn't make sense to me until I read Charles Fourier, the nineteenth-century utopian philosopher. Fourier was the Rosetta stone for Darger."

The link between Darger and Fourier is a little hard to discern. Darger didn't know about Fourier, as far as we know, and the rest of us may be inclined to see the connection as a dazzling example of Chan's "reckless" reading technique. "He and Darger were both hedonists and proto-feminists," Chan said, trying to be helpful, "and, to me, Darger was illustrating Fourier's philosophy." Chan had made some drawings on the Darger-Fourier theme before he got to Bard, but it was there, working fourteen hours a day or more at his computer, that he completed the seventeen-minute animated video called "Happiness (Finally) After 35,000 Years of Civilization—After Henry Darger and Charles Fourier."

The real world, meanwhile, had grown darker. Chan was attending a film and video conference in Amsterdam on September 11, 2001. Hearing people talking about something that had happened in New York, he went to a nearby bar and saw TV images of the Pentagon on fire. "Coming back from Amsterdam, the first thought was just to understand my city again," he said. "To see friends, do what you can, try to come to terms with it. To have coherent thoughts about what had happened seemed like hubris."

The war in Afghanistan triggered something, though; he made a single-channel video called "Re: The_Operation," in which members of the Bush Administration, their faces bloodied or bandaged, can be heard (in voice-over) writing letters home from the front—as if they themselves had gone to fight.

Chan's opposition to the invasion of Iraq brought him into contact with Voices in the Wilderness, a Chicago-based group formed in 1996 to protest the economic sanctions that were causing such devastation for Iraqi civilians. The group had been sending small teams into Iraq, in defiance of U.S. law. Chan joined a team that left for Baghdad on December 12, 2002. For the next month, he spent much of his time talking to people and shooting video footage and still photographs of everyday life in Baghdad. He was surprised by how friendly most Iraqis were, and how unconcerned they seemed over what was about to happen to them. "I was also surprised by how Western it felt there," he said. "I heard hip-hop songs playing on the radio that I'd heard two weeks before in New York." When people in Baghdad heard his name, they got very excited. "Jackie Chan?" they'd ask.

In New York, Chan and others posted thousands of copies of his photographs of Iraqi civilians around town, each one imprinted with a date and the word "Baghdad." Chan, who had left Fordham in 2001 and was teaching at Hunter College and the University of Pennsylvania, talked about his Iraq experiences at several colleges and at informal gatherings in New York and other cities. He edited his footage into a video that he called "Baghdad in No Particular Order," which was shown in a MOMA nonfiction film series at the Gramercy Theatre. "In the midst of all this," he told me, "I got an e-mail from Carol Greene"—the owner of the Greene Naftali Gallery, in Chelsea—"asking to see some of my work. I sent her DVD documentation of 'Happiness,' and she put it in her 2003 summer show." What people saw there was not the DVD but a full-scale video installation projected on a two-sided, translucent three-by-eight-foot screen that allowed the vividly colored images to appear on both sides. It was the first piece of Chan's to appear in an art gallery, and several reviewers took notice. Roberta Smith, in the *Times*, called it "a brilliantly imagined work." David Teiger bought the Greene Naftali installation (one of an edition of six) and donated it to MOMA. Chan's reaction was typically low key. "Iraq had taken over my life," he said, "so it was nice to be reminded that there were other parts."

He immediately set to work on a second animated video. Called "My birds . . . trash . . . the future," this one was grimmer in tone and content than anything he'd done to date. "My birds," which occupied him for a year and a half, evoked a sort of wasteland, with a Goyaesque dead tree full of carrion birds, a huge black cloud that suggested, among other things, the oil wells that Saddam's retreating army had set on fire in the first Gulf War, and two male protagonists (based on the rapper Biggie Smalls and the director Pier Paolo Pasolini, both murder victims in real life) struggling to survive marauding hunters, freezing cold, and violent winds. The new work was a two-channel projection; each side of the fourteen-foot-long screen showed the same scene (more or less), but from different angles, front and back. "When I was making the piece, I was a real misanthrope," Chan said. "I wanted to use the form of 'Waiting for Godot,' but I didn't want to give hope to humans, so I gave it to birds. They're the Biblical birds, the ones you're forbidden to eat in Leviticus." He added, "It's the birds who wait. They stick around. They act more human than the humans."

"My birds" drew respectful, though not ecstatic, reviews when it was shown at Greene Naftali in 2004. Jerry Saltz, in the *Village Voice*, praised the work's "extravagant, eye-popping color"; the *Times*' Michael Kimmelman called it "hypnotic at first, then dull." Carol Greene had no trouble placing all five editions of the new work in major collections, however; there is a deep emotional undercurrent to Chan's videos, a sense of longing and even pain which is strangely moving. "Whatever he does is charged," the artist Rachel Harrison, who has known Chan since 2002, said. "It feels like it's exploding."

Chan and I are in the back room of his studio, a drab two-room suite in an industrial building in Chelsea. Computer equipment takes up most of the space, but to protect himself from what

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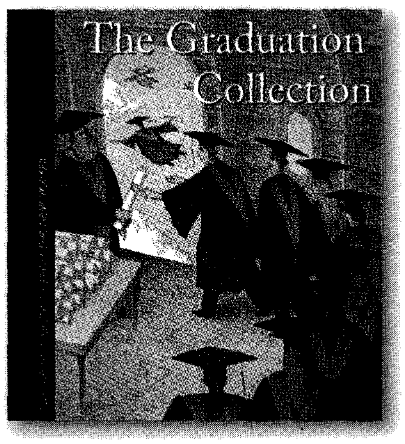

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he calls "the tyranny of connectedness" he has no Internet access. A side wall is covered with sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century illustrations from pornographic books—research for his new art project, which, he tells me, deals with "the secular trio of politics, philosophy, and pornography, the three things that freed us from God as an institution." (A large drawing of the Marquis de Sade, flaunting both rifle and penis, is wedged into an alcove in Chan's New Museum show: a preview of coming events.) On one of his several computers, he demonstrates for me the process by which he animates his images, using a sequence from "My birds." "That's my last window," he says. What he means is that he's no longer making works that, like a great deal of art since the Renaissance, give the impression that you're looking at a scene framed by a window. His alternative, he says, is "windowless light," as in "The 7 ~~Lights~~."

After "My birds," Chan's next step was to animate a famous Caravaggio still-life, the "Basket of Fruit" (c. 1599). He had read that this was "the stillest thing in painting," so, naturally, he drew his own version of it on a computer and set it in motion. Leaves, stems, grapes, pears break away one by one and rise slowly, quiveringly, followed eventually by the basket itself. With the Caravaggio piece, he said, "Part of the idea had to do with religion as an invisible force, like gravity, and so can you invert it?" He was pleased with the video—it's called "Untitled (After St. Caravaggio)," and is in the New Museum show—but it wasn't really what he'd been after. "It still has the lines and shapes and colors of 'My birds,' and you're still looking at it through the camera obscura of the past. I realized that what I had to do was impoverish the image. I had to give up all the things that I thought were my strengths—the vibrant color, the brutal clarity of line that comes from digital animations, the sort of depth I got by almost putting the foreground and the background together. If you're willing to impoverish, you can go on to something else."

The solution gradually took shape as he lay in bed watching the play of light and shadow on the floor, wall, and ceiling of his bedroom, which by then was in a tiny apartment in Brooklyn. "The shadows cast by the power lines and the trees and the cars carried all the rhythms, movements, and dimensions of images in a film," he said. "After the Caravaggio piece, I said, 'No more color, no more sharp lines. Can you work with blurry? Can you work with a projection that is not framed, and project it on the floor? Can you free it from what it is, to become what it can be?' " At first, he tried to capture real shadows with a video camera, but that didn't work—the results were both "too real and not real enough." In the end, over two years, he drew every image and detail in "The 7 ~~Lights~~" himself and animated them digitally.

In the fall of 2006, Chan was invited to lecture on art at Tulane University. He had never been to New Orleans, and the city's devastation astonished him. "The smell of putridness was still there if the wind was right," he said. Back in New York, he talked to Anne Pasternak, the president and artistic director of the public-art organization Creative Time, about an idea that had come to him, which was to have "Waiting for Godot" performed, outdoors, in that stricken city. Susan Sontag's production of the play in Sarajevo, in 1993, was certainly on his mind, but "Godot" seemed even more relevant to the situation in New Orleans. "You couldn't help but see it," he remembers telling Pasternak. "The emptiness, the stillness, the sense of waiting—they're still waiting for help."

"The minute I heard that, goose bumps went down my arms," Pasternak remembers. " 'I don't know what this means,' I said, 'but I'm in.'" What it meant for Chan was a nine-month obsession, which began with his going to see Christopher McElroen, the co-founder of the Classical Theatre of Harlem. Chan had heard about the group's 2006 performance of "Godot" in Harlem, which was inspired by Katrina; its central prop was a rooftop emerging from a stage flooded with water. McElroen had originally wanted to take his own production to New Orleans, but the logistics were too complicated. Early in 2007, Creative Time agreed to produce the play.

"I knew we couldn't take anything for granted, certainly not an audience," Chan told me. "Who wants art? We went around talking to as many different people down there as we could, not selling them the idea that New York artists were coming to bring them something but just letting them know we were going to be in town and would love to work with them." They spoke to a man named Robert Lynn Green, Sr., whose mother and three-year-old granddaughter had died in the flood. Green, who is fifty-three, was living in a FEMA trailer in the Lower Ninth Ward, where his house had been—the area was now a bare, weed-choked landscape, with concrete slabs the only evidence of the missing houses. "Robert really sweated me," Chan said. " 'Why do you want to do this? What does it have to do with us?' " Chan gave him his telephone number and his copy of the play, and the next morning Green called him. "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse," he said, quoting Beckett. After that, Green became their unofficial ambassador, adviser, and chief publicist.

Chan moved to New Orleans in August, and stayed there. Marlo Poras, his girlfriend, took time off from her filmmaking and moved down, too. New Orleans "was like nothing I'd experienced," she told me. "Paul lost himself in wanting to help." He came up with the idea of a "shadow fund," to match the money that Creative Time was raising for the production and to distribute grants to local community groups. He taught, without pay, at Xavier and at the University of New Orleans, and he went every Sunday to Robert Green's Baptist church.

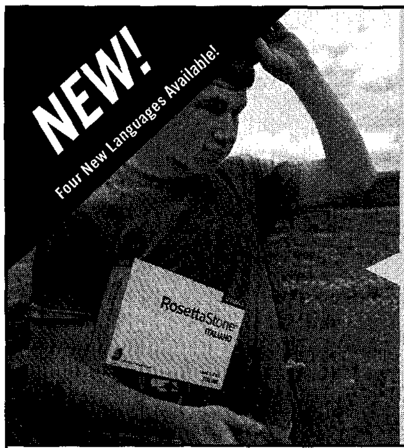
The site Chan and McElroen eventually selected was in the Lower Ninth Ward, a couple of blocks from Green's trailer and close to one of the breached levees. It matched Beckett's stage direction: "A country road. A tree." (Some big trees had survived here, but the one they used was made by Chan, out of a junked metal coatrack and other scrap materials.) Urged to perform in another neighborhood as well, because the city's tragedy was so widespread, Chan and McElroen picked a site in the badly damaged Gentilly section. Wendell Pierce, who played Didi in the Harlem production and would play him again in New Orleans, had grown up in Gentilly; everyone in town knew him from "The Wire," the HBO series in which he had appeared for the past five years. After months of preparatory work, they scheduled four performances in early November, two in the Lower Ninth and two the following weekend in Gentilly. Admission was free; Creative Time was providing chairs for six hundred people, but nobody had any idea how many would show up.

As it turned out, more than a thousand people had to be turned away at the first performance. A school bus that was supposed to bring the unnamed messenger ("a boy") to the stage couldn't get through; McElroen had the boy sit in the audience and put a spotlight on him when he moved forward to speak his lines. The audience, which was about equally divided between blacks and whites, and included plenty of children, was served gumbo in a tent near the performance area, and was then led to the seats by a second-line jazz band.

McElroen had cast other actors from Classical Theatre's repertory group as Gogo (J. Kyle Manzay) and Pozzo (T. Ryder Smith), and local actors for the other roles. There had been some problems in rehearsal, but the first performance went off without a hitch. The audience listened raptly, and roared with laughter at the jokes—especially Pierce's improvised line when he ran into the audience and came back saying, "What are all these white people doing in the Ninth Ward?" (Pierce is black.) At the curtain call, the cast took their bows and then turned and, as McElroen said, "kind of melted into the darkness, walking slowly back toward the broken levee. It was one of the most powerful moments I've ever experienced."

So many people were turned away the next night that they did a third performance in the Ninth Ward, and the crowds were almost as big. "There were times when I felt I wasn't in a play," Pierce said recently. "To be surrounded by the people of that community, in the middle of the Ninth Ward, where many have died, and it's two and a half years later and still looking like that. And you're saying, 'At this place, at this moment in time, all mankind is us. Let us make the most of it. While we have a chance let us do something, before it's too late.' Those lines just ring and ring."

A few days after his opening at the New Museum, Chan returned to New Orleans for the first time since "Godot." Robert Green had invited him to a memorial service he'd arranged for his granddaughter, and Chan went with Marlo and his mother. Before he left, I asked him whether the "Godot" experience had changed his thinking about the incompatibility of art and politics, or art and social justice. Chan thought for a minute and then, quietly, said no. "People did come together," he said. "That was part of what happened, but it wasn't what I was after. I was after articulate speechlessness—you know, the thing I talked about in my first experience with Beckett. It's like the clearing of a space. My mind was cleared for something else to happen, which I think is what art does. If you do it right, that's what happens." He went on, "I think that art can be any number of things at once, and they can all be contradictory." ◆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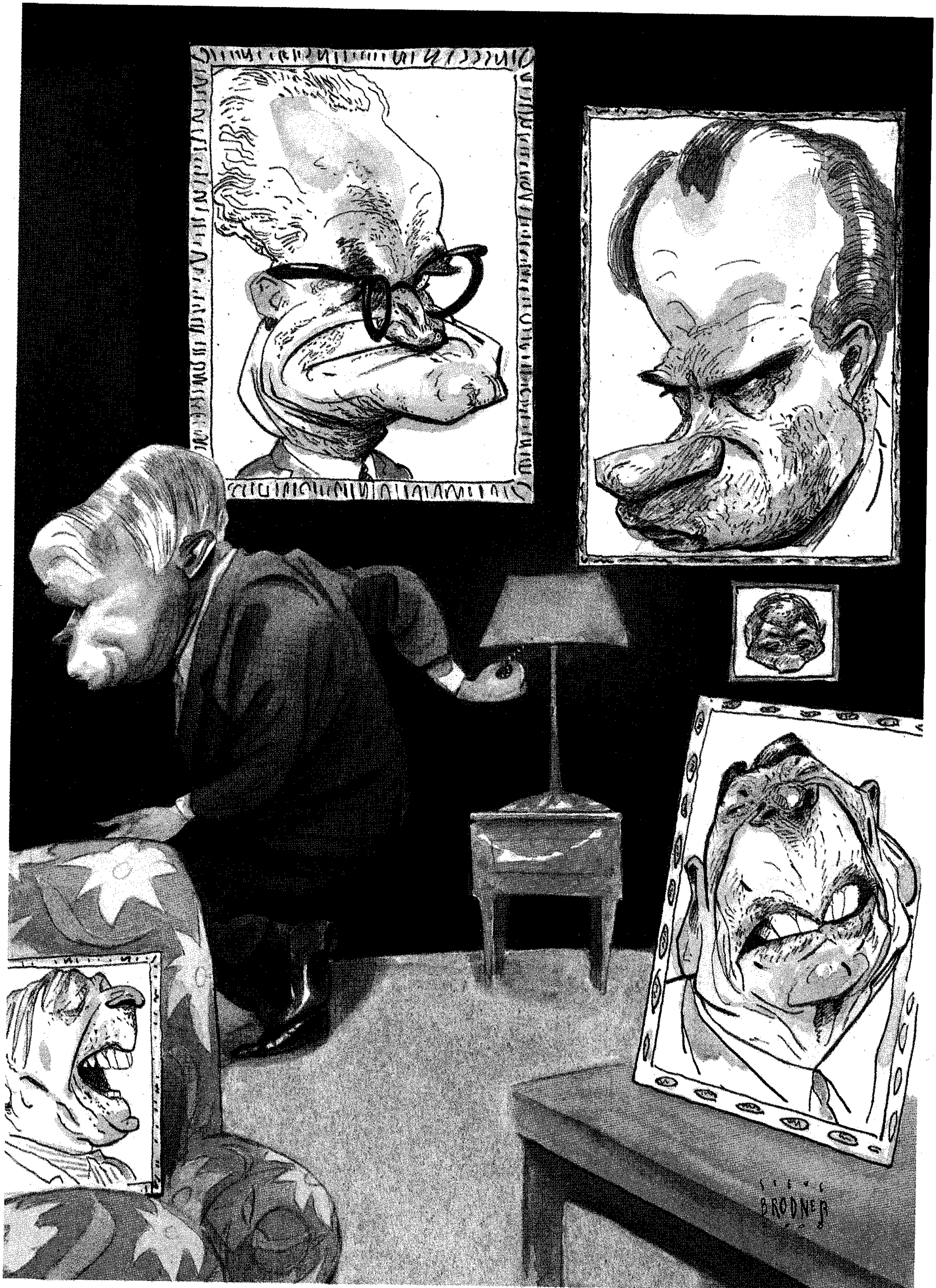
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McCain must negotiate the legacies of (from top left) Goldwater, Nixon, Gingrich, Reagan, and Buckley.

THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE FALL OF CONSERVATISM

Have the Republicans run out of ideas?

BY GEORGE PACKER

The era of American politics that has been dying before our eyes was born in 1966. That January, a twenty-seven-year-old editorial writer for the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* named Patrick Buchanan went to work for Richard Nixon, who was just beginning the most improbable political comeback in American history. Having served as Vice-President in the Eisenhower Administration, Nixon had lost the Presidency by a whisker to John F. Kennedy, in 1960, and had been humiliated in a 1962 bid for the California governorship. But he saw that he could propel himself back to power on the strength of a new feeling among Americans who, appalled by the chaos of the cities, the moral heedlessness of the young, and the insults to national pride in Vietnam, were ready to blame it all on the liberalism of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Right-wing populism was bubbling up from below; it needed to be guided by a leader who understood its resentments because he felt them, too.

"From Day One, Nixon and I talked about creating a new majority," Buchanan told me recently, sitting in the library of his Greek-revival house in McLean, Virginia, on a secluded lane bordering the fenced grounds of the Central Intelligence Agency. "What we talked about, basically, was shearing off huge segments of F.D.R.'s New Deal coalition, which L.B.J. had held together: Northern Catholic ethnics and Southern Protestant conservatives—what we called the Daley-Rizzo Democrats in the North and, frankly, the Wallace Democrats in the South." Buchanan grew up in Washington, D.C., among the first group—men like his father, an accountant and a father of nine, who had supported Roosevelt but also revered Joseph McCarthy. The Southerners were the kind of men whom Nixon whipped into a frenzy one night in the fall of 1966, at the Wade Hampton Hotel, in Columbia, South Carolina. Nixon, who was then a partner in a New York law firm, had travelled there with Buchanan on behalf of Republican congressional candidates. Buchanan recalls that the room was full of sweat, cigar smoke, and rage; the rhetoric, which was about patriotism and law and order, "burned the paint off the walls." As they left the hotel, Nixon said, "This is the future of this Party, right here in the South."

Nixon and Buchanan visited thirty-five states that fall, and in November the Republicans won a midterm landslide. It was the end of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the beginning of his fall from power. In order to seize the Presidency in 1968, Nixon had to live down his history of nasty politicking, and he ran that year as a uniter. But his Administration adopted an undercover strategy for building a Republican majority, working to create the impression that there were two Americas: the quiet, ordinary, patriotic, religious, law-abiding Many, and the noisy, élitist, amoral, disorderly, condescending Few.

This strategy was put into action near the end of Nixon's first year in office, when antiwar demonstrators were becoming a disruptive presence in Washington. Buchanan recalls urging Nixon, "We've got to use the siege gun of the Presidency, and go right *after* these guys." On November 3, 1969, Nixon went on national television to speak about the need to avoid a shameful defeat in Vietnam. Looking benignly into the camera, he concluded, "And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of Americans—I ask for your support." It was the most successful speech of his Presidency. Newscasters criticized him for being divisive and for offering no new vision on Vietnam, but tens of thousands of telegrams and letters expressing approval poured into the White House. It was Nixon's particular political genius to rouse simultaneously the contempt of the *bien-pensants* and the admiration of those who felt the sting of that contempt in their own lives.

Buchanan urged Nixon to enlist his Vice-President, Spiro Agnew, in a battle against the press. In November, Nixon sent Agnew—despised as dull-witted by the media—on the road, where he denounced "this small and unelected élite" of editors, anchormen, and analysts. Buchanan recalls watching a broadcast of one such speech—which he had written for Agnew—on a television in his White House office. Joining him was his colleague Kevin Phillips, who had just published "The Emerging Republican Majority," which marshalled electoral data to support a prophecy that Sun Belt conservatism—like Jacksonian Democracy, Republican industrialism, and New Deal liberalism—would dominate American politics for the next thirty-two or thirty-six years. (As it turns out, Phillips was slightly too modest.) When Agnew finished his diatribe, Phillips said two words: "Positive polarization."

Polarization is the theme of Rick Perlstein's new narrative history "Nixonland" (Scribner), which covers the years between two electoral landslides: Barry Goldwater's defeat in 1964 and George McGovern's in 1972. During that time, Nixon figured out that he could succeed politically "by *using* the angers, anxieties, and resentments produced by the cultural chaos of the 1960s," which were also his own. In Perlstein's terms, America in the sixties was divided, like the Sneetches on Dr. Seuss's beaches, into two social clubs: the Franklins, who were the in-crowd at Nixon's alma mater, Whittier College; and the Orthogonians, a rival group founded by Nixon after the Franklins rejected him, made up of "the strivers, those not to the manor born, the commuter students like him. He persuaded his fellows that reveling in one's unpolish was a nobility of its own." Orthogonians deeply resented Franklins, which, as Perlstein sees

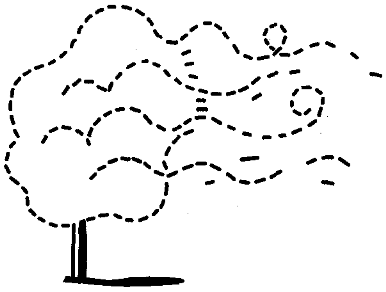
STEVE BRODNER

it, explains just about everything that happened between 1964 and 1972: Nixon resented the Kennedys and clawed his way back to power; construction workers resented John Lindsay and voted conservative; National Guardsmen resented student protesters and opened fire on them. Perlstein sustains these categories throughout the book, without quite noticing that his scheme breaks down under the pressure of his central historical insight—"America was engulfed in a pitched battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. The only thing was: Americans disagreed radically over which side was which." In other words, by 1972 there were hardly any Franklins left—only former Franklins who had thrown off their dinner jackets, picked up a weapon, and joined the brawl. The sixties, which began in liberal consensus over the Cold War and civil rights, became a struggle between two apocalyptic politics that each saw the other as hell-bent on the country's annihilation. The result was violence like nothing the country had seen since the Civil War, and Perlstein emphasizes that bombings, assaults, and murders committed by segregationists, hardhats, and vigilantes on the right were at least as numerous as those by radical students and black militants on the left. Nixon claimed to speak on behalf of "the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators," but the cigar smokers in that South Carolina hotel were intoxicated with hate.

Nixon was coldly mixing and pouring volatile passions. Although he was careful to renounce the extreme fringe of Birchites and racists, his means to power eventually became the end. Buchanan gave me a copy of a seven-page confidential memorandum—"A little raw for today," he warned—that he had written for Nixon in 1971, under the heading "Dividing the Democrats." Drawn up with an acute understanding of the fragilities and fault lines in "the Old Roosevelt Coalition," it recommended that the White House "exacerbate the ideological division" between the Old and New Left by praising Democrats who supported any of Nixon's policies; highlight "the elitism and quasi-anti-Americanism of the National Democratic Party"; nominate for the Supreme Court a Southern strict constructionist who would divide Democrats regionally; use abortion and parochial-school aid to deepen the split between Catholics and social liberals; elicit white working-class support with tax relief and denunciations of welfare. Finally, the memo recommended exploiting racial tensions among Democrats. "Bumper stickers calling for black Presidential and especially Vice-Presidential candidates should be spread out in the ghettoes of the country," Buchanan wrote. "We should do what is within our power to have a black nominated for Number Two, at least at the Democratic National Convention." Such gambits, he added, could "cut the Democratic Party and country in half; my view is that we would have far the larger half."

The Nixon White House didn't enact all of these recommendations, but it would be hard to find a more succinct and unapologetic blueprint for Republican success in the conservative era. "Positive polarization" helped the Republicans win one election after another—and insured that American politics would be an ugly, unredeemed business for decades to come.

Perlstein argues that the politics of "Nixonland" will endure for at least another generation. On his final page, he writes, "Do Americans not hate each other enough to fantasize about killing one another, in cold blood, over political and cultural disagreements? It would be hard to argue they do not." Yet the polarization of America, which we now call the "culture wars," has been dissipating for a long time. Because we can't anticipate what ideas and language will dominate the next cycle of American politics, the previous era's key words—"élite," "mainstream," "real," "values," "patriotic," "snob," "liberal"—seem as potent as ever. Indeed, they have shown up in the current campaign: North Carolina and Mississippi Republicans have produced ads linking local Democrats to Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama's controversial former pastor. The right-wing group Citizens United has said that it will run ads portraying Obama as yet another "limousine liberal." But these are the spasms of nerve endings in an organism that's brain-dead. Among Republicans, there is no energy, no fresh thinking, no ability to capture the concerns and feelings of millions of people. In the past two months, Democratic targets of polarization attacks have won three special congressional elections, in solidly Republican districts in Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Political tactics have a way of outliving their ability to respond to the felt needs and aspirations of the electorate: Democrats continued to accuse Republicans of being like Herbert Hoover well into the nineteen-seventies; Republicans will no doubt accuse Democrats of being out of touch with real Americans long after George W. Bush retires to Crawford, Texas. But the 2006 and 2008 elections are the hinge on which America is entering a new political era.



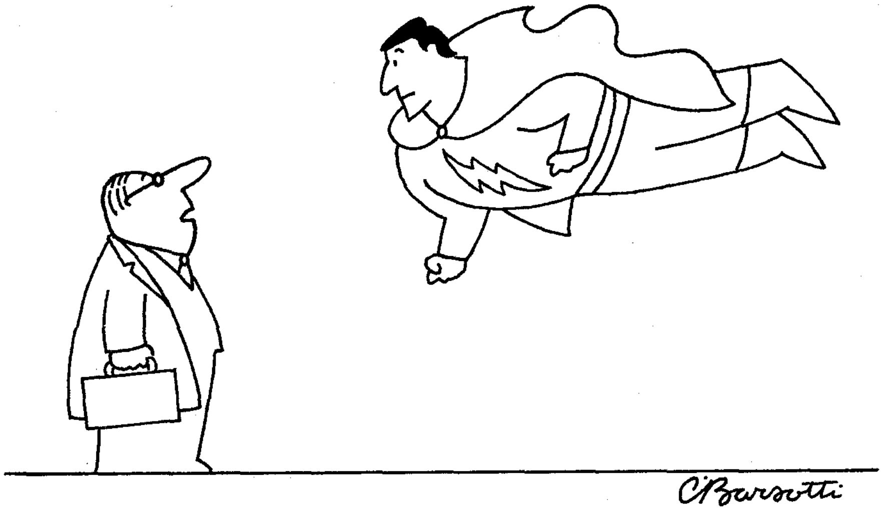
This will be true whether or not John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, wins in November. He and his likely Democratic opponent, Barack Obama, "both embody a post-polarized, or anti-polarized, style of politics," the *Times* columnist David Brooks told me. "McCain, crucially, missed the sixties, and in some ways he's a pre-sixties figure. He and Obama don't resonate with the sixties at all." The fact that the least conservative, least divisive Republican in the 2008 race is the last one standing—despite being despised by significant voices on the right—shows how little life is left in the movement that Goldwater began, Nixon brought into power, Ronald Reagan gave mass appeal, Newt Gingrich radicalized, Tom DeLay criminalized, and Bush allowed to break into pieces. "The fact that there was no conventional, establishment, old-style conservative candidate was not an accident," Brooks said. "Mitt Romney pretended to be one for a while, but he wasn't. Rudy Giuliani sort of pretended, but he wasn't. McCain is certainly not. It's not only a lack of political talent—there's just no driving force, and it will soften up normal Republicans for change."

On May 6th, Newt Gingrich posted a message, "My Plea to Republicans: It's Time for Real Change to Avoid Real Disaster," on the Web site of the conservative magazine *Human Events*. The former House Speaker warned, "The Republican brand has been so badly damaged that if

Republicans try to run an anti-Obama, anti-Reverend Wright, or (if Senator Clinton wins) anti-Clinton campaign, they are simply going to fail." Gingrich offered nine suggestions for restoring the Republican "brand"—among them "Overhaul the census and cut its budget radically" and "Implement a space-based, G.P.S.-style air-traffic control system"—which read like a wonkish parody of the Contract with America. By the next morning, the post had received almost three hundred comments, almost all predicting a long Republican winter.

Yuval Levin, a former Bush White House official, who is now a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, agrees with Gingrich's diagnosis. "There's an intellectual fatigue, even if it hasn't yet been made clear by defeat at the polls," he said. "The conservative idea factory is not producing as it did. You hear it from everybody, but nobody agrees what to do about it."

Pat Buchanan was less polite, paraphrasing the social critic Eric Hoffer: "Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket."



"It was only a sigh, but thank you for your concern."

Only a few years ago, on the night of Bush's victory in 2004, the conservative movement seemed indomitable. In fact, it was rapidly falling apart. Conservatives knew how to win elections; however, they turned out not to be very interested in governing. Throughout the decades since Nixon, conservatism has retained the essentially negative character of an insurgent movement.

Nixon himself was more interested in global grand strategy and partisan politics than in any conservative policy agenda. By today's standards, his achievements in office look like those of a moderate liberal: he eased the tensions of the Cold War, expanded the welfare state, and supported affirmative action (albeit in ways calculated to split the Democrats). "L.B.J. built the foundation and the first floor of the Great Society," Buchanan said. "We built the skyscraper. Nixon was *not* a Reaganite conservative."

Even Reagan, the Moses of the conservative movement, was more ideological in his rhetoric than in his governance. Conservatives have canonized him for cutting taxes and regulation, moving the courts to the right, and helping to vanquish the Soviet empire. But he proved less dogmatic than most of his opponents and some of his followers expected, especially on ending the Cold War. Reagan emphasized the first word in "positive polarization," turning the Nixon playbook into a kind of national celebration. Like F.D.R., he dominated an era by reconciling opposites through force of personality: just as Roosevelt the patrician became the tribune of the people, Reagan turned conservatism into a forward-looking, optimistic ideology. "We started in 1980 and played addition," Ed Rollins, Reagan's political director, recalls. "'Let's go out and get Democrats.' We attracted a great many young people to the Party. Reagan made them feel good about the country again. After the '84 election, we did polling—Why did you vote for Reagan? They said, 'He's a winner.'"

The Princeton historian Sean Wilentz, in his new book, "The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008" (Harper), argues that Reagan "learned how to seize and keep control of the terms of public debate." On taxes, race, government spending, national security, crime, welfare, and "traditional values," he made mainstream what had been the positions of the right-wing fringe, and he kept Democrats on the defensive. He also brought a generation of doctrinaire conservatives into the bureaucracy and the courts, making appointments based on ideological tests that only a genuine movement leader would impose. The rightward turn of the judiciary will probably be the most lasting achievement of Reagan and his movement.

In retrospect, the Reagan Presidency was the high-water mark of conservatism. "In some respects, the conservative movement was a victim of success," Wilentz concludes. "With the Soviet Union dissolved, inflation reduced to virtually negligible levels, and the top tax rate cut to nearly half of what it was in 1980, all of Ronald Reagan's major stated goals when he took office had been achieved, leaving perplexed and fractious conservatives to fight over where they might now lead the country." Wilentz omits one important failure. According to Buchanan, who was the White House communications director in Reagan's second term, the President once told his barber, Milton Pitts, "You know, Milt, I came here to do five things, and four out of five ain't bad." He had succeeded in lowering taxes, raising morale, increasing defense spending, and facing down the Soviet Union; but he had failed to limit the size of government, which, besides anti-Communism, was the abiding passion of Reagan's political career and of the conservative movement. He didn't come close to achieving it and didn't try very hard, recognizing early that the public would be happy to have its taxes cut as long as its programs weren't touched. And Reagan was a poor steward of the unglamorous but necessary operations of the state. Wilentz notes that he presided over a period of corruption and favoritism, encouraging hostility toward government agencies and "a general disregard for oversight safeguards as among the evils of 'big government.' " In this, and in a notorious attempt to expand executive power outside the Constitution—the Iran-Contra affair—Reagan's Presidency presaged that of George W. Bush.

After Reagan and the end of the Cold War, conservatism lost the ties that had bound together its disparate factions—libertarians, evangelicals, neoconservatives, Wall Street, working-class traditionalists. Without the Gipper and the Evil Empire, what was the organizing principle? In 1994, the conservative journalist David Frum surveyed the landscape and published a book called "Dead Right." Reagan, he wrote, had offered his "Morning in America" vision, and the public had rewarded him enormously, but in failing to reduce government he had allowed the welfare state to continue infantilizing the public, weakening its moral fibre. That November, Republicans swept to power in Congress and imagined that they had been deputized by the voters to distill conservatism into its purest essence. Newt Gingrich declared, "On those things which are at the core of our philosophy and on those things where we believe we represent the vast majority of Americans, there will be no compromise." Instead of just limiting government, the Gingrich revolutionaries set out to disable it. Although the legislative reins were in their hands, these Republicans could find no governmental projects to organize their energy around. David Brooks said, "The only thing that held the coalition together was hostility to government." When the *Times Magazine* asked William Kristol what ideas he was *for*—in early 1995, high noon of the Gingrich Revolution—Kristol could think to mention only school choice and "shaping the culture."

At the end of that year, when the radical conservatives in the Gingrich Congress shut down the federal government, they learned that the American public was genuinely attached to the modern state. "An anti-government philosophy turned out to be politically unpopular and fundamentally un-American," Brooks said. "People want something melioristic, they want government to do things."

Instead of governing, the Republican majority in Congress—along with right-wing authors, journalists, talk-radio personalities, think tanks, and foundations—surrendered to the negative strain of modern conservatism. As political strategy, this strain went back to the Nixon era, but its philosophical roots were older and deeper. It extended back to William F. Buckley, Jr.,'s mission statement, in the inaugural issue of *National Review,* in 1955, that the new magazine "stands athwart history, yelling Stop"; and to Goldwater's seminal 1960 book, "The Conscience of a Conservative," in which he wrote, "I have little interest in streamlining government or in making it more efficient, for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom. My aim is not to pass laws, but to repeal them. It is not to inaugurate new programs, but to cancel old ones." By the end of the century, a movement inspired by sophisticated works such as Russell Kirk's 1953 "The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot" churned out degenerate descendants with titles like "How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)." Shortly after engineering President Bill Clinton's impeachment on a narrow party-line basis, Gingrich was gone.

Though conservatives were not much interested in governing, they understood the art of politics. They hadn't made much of a dent in the bureaucracy, and they had done nothing to provide universal health-care coverage or arrest growing economic inequality, but they had created a political culture that was inhospitable to welfare, to an indulgent view of criminals, to high rates of taxation. They had controlled the language and moved the political parameters to the right. Back in November, 1967, Buckley wrote in an essay on Ronald Reagan, "They say that his accomplishments are few, that it is only the rhetoric that is conservative. But the rhetoric is the principal thing. It precedes all action. All thoughtful action."

In 2000, George W. Bush presented himself as Reagan's heir, but he didn't come into office with Reagan's ideological commitments or his public-policy goals. According to Frum, who worked as a White House speechwriter during Bush's first two years, Bush couldn't have won if he'd run as a real conservative, because the country was already moving in a new direction. Bush's goals, like Nixon's, were political. Nixon had set out to expand the Republican vote; Bush wanted to keep it from contracting. At his first meeting with Frum and other speechwriters, Bush declared, "I want to change the Party"—to soften its hard edge, and make the Party more hospitable to Hispanics. "It was all about positioning," Frum said, "not about confronting a new generation of problems." Frum wasn't happy; although he suspected that Bush might be right, he wanted him to govern along hard-line conservative principles.

The phrase that signalled Bush's approach was "compassionate conservatism," but it never amounted to a policy program. Within hours of the Supreme Court decision that ended the disputed Florida recount, Dick Cheney met with a group of moderate Republican senators, including Lincoln Chafee, of Rhode Island. According to Chafee's new book, "Against the Tide: How a Compliant Congress Empowered a Reckless President" (Thomas Dunne), the Vice-President-elect gave the new order of battle: "We would seek confrontation on

"I need to wait until the euphoria wears off before I start dating again."

every front. . . . The new Administration would divide Americans into red and blue, and divide nations into those who stand with us or against us." Cheney's combative instincts and belief in an unfettered and secretive executive proved far more influential at the White House than Bush's campaign promise to be "a uniter, not a divider." Cheney behaved as if, notwithstanding the loss of the popular vote, conservative Republican domination could continue by sheer force of will. On domestic policy, the Administration made tax cuts and privatization its highest priority; and its conduct of the war on terror broke with sixty years of relatively bipartisan and multilateralist foreign policy.

The Administration's political operatives were moving in the same direction. The Republican strategist Matthew Dowd studied the 2000 results and concluded that the proportion of swing voters in America had declined from twenty-two to seven per cent over the previous two decades, which meant that mobilizing the Party's base would be more important in 2004 than attracting independents. The strategist Karl Rove's polarizing political tactics (which brought a new level of demographic sophistication to the old formula) buried any hope of a centrist Presidency before Bush's first term was half finished.

Ed Rollins said, "Rove knew his voters, he stuck to the message with consistency, he drove that base hard—and there's nothing left of it. Today, if you're not rich or Southern or born again, the chances of your being a Republican are not great." As long as Bush and his party kept winning elections, however slim the margins, Rove's declared ambition to create a "permanent majority" seemed like the vision of a tactical genius. But it was built on two illusions: that the conservative era would stretch on indefinitely, and that politics matters more than governing. The first illusion defied history; the second was blown up in Iraq and drowned in New Orleans. David Brooks argues that these disasters discredited both neo- and compassionate conservatism in the eyes of many Republicans. "You've got to learn from the failures," Brooks told me. "But Republicans have rejected the entire attempt. For example, after Katrina, House Republicans wanted nothing to do with New Orleans. They were, like, 'We don't care about those people.'"

In its final year, the Bush Administration is seen by many conservatives (along with seventy per cent of Americans) to be a failure. Among true believers, there are two explanations of why this happened and what it portends. One is the purist version: Bush expanded the size of government and created huge deficits; allowed Republicans in Congress to fatten lobbyists and stuff budgets full of earmarks; tried to foist democracy on a Muslim country; failed to secure the border; and thus won the justified wrath of the American people. This account—shared by Pat Buchanan, the columnist George F. Will, and many Republicans in Congress—has the appeal of asking relatively little of conservatives. They need only to repent of their sins, rid themselves of the neoconservatives who had agitated for the Iraq invasion, and return to first principles. Buchanan said, "The conservatives need to, in Maoist terms, go back to Yenan."

The second version—call it reformist—is more painful, because it's based on the recognition that, though Bush's fatal incompetence and Rove's shortsighted tactics hastened the conservative movement's demise, they didn't cause it. In this view, conservatism has a more serious problem than self-betrayal: a doctrinaire failure to adapt to new circumstances, new problems. Instead of heading back to Yenan to regroup, conservatives will have to spend some years or even decades wandering across a bleak political landscape of losing campaigns and rebranding efforts and earnest policy retreats, much as liberals did after 1968, before they can hope to reëstablish dominance.

Recently, I spoke with a number of conservatives about their movement. The younger ones—say, those under fifty—uniformly subscribe to the reformist version. They are in a state of glowing revulsion at the condition of their political party. Most of them predicted that Republicans will lose the Presidency this year and suffer a rout in Congress. They seemed to feel that these losses would be deserved, and suggested that, if the party wins, it will be—in the words of Rich Lowry, the thirty-nine-year-old editor of *National Review*—"by default."

On April 4th, a rainy day in New York, I attended Buckley's memorial Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral with some two thousand people, an unusually large number of them women in hats and men in bow ties. George W. Rutler, the presiding priest, declared that Buckley's words helped "crack the walls of an evil empire." Secular humanism, he said, "builds little hells for man on earth. . . . Communism was worse than a social tyranny because it was a theological heresy." The service reminded me of the movement's philosophical origins, in the forties and fifties, in a Catholic sense of alarm at the relativism that was rampant in American life, and an insistence on human frailty. The conservative movement began as a true counterculture; how unlikely that its gloomy creed took hold in America, the optimistic capital of modernity.

Later that day, the Manhattan Institute and National Review Institute held a forum on Buckley's legacy, at the Princeton Club. The panelists—mostly members of the Old Guard—remembered Buckley, traded Latin phrases, and exuded self-satisfaction. Roger Kimball, the co-editor of the dour cultural review *The New Criterion*, declared that conservatism imposes a philosophical duty on its adherents to enjoy life—to which George Will, not ebullient by disposition, later added, "Politics is fun, because politics involves inherently the celebration of America's first principles. . . . Politics is an inherently cheerful undertaking, so be of good cheer. That is what Bill left us with." Kimball continued to roll up the score in favor of conservatives. Their reputation for being "un-fun," he said, stems partly from the fact that they are "realists" who are "a wet blanket on people who talk about things like 'The Audacity of Hope' and 'It Takes a Village,' just to pick two terms arbitrarily." The country, he said, "is still suffering from that post-Romantic assault on humanity that is summarized by the term 'the sixties.' This, too, shall pass."

Once the principled levity had died down and it came time for questions, I asked whether the conservative movement was dead. "It would be a sign of maturity if conservatives would stop using the phrase 'conservative movement,' " Will said. "This is now a center-right country, and conservatism is the default position for, I think, a stable Presidential majority." Jay Nordlinger, an editor at *National Review*, added, "If it's no longer a movement, and really is mainstream, we owe a lot to Bill Buckley and Reagan." But

Buckley himself had been more realistic than his eulogists. Sam Tanenhaus, the editor of the *Times Book Review* and the Week in Review section, who is working on a biography of Buckley, said that in his final years Buckley understood that his movement was cracking up. "He told me, 'The conservative movement lost its raison d'être with the end of Communism and never got it back.'"

Between the Mass and the forum, I had lunch with David Frum. His mood was elegiac and chastened. He now realized that, in 2001, Bush had been right and he had been wrong at their first meeting: the Party did need to change, but not in the way Bush went on to change it. "It wasn't a successful Presidency, and that's a painful thing," Frum said. "And I was a very small, unimportant part of it, but I was a part of it, and that implies responsibility." Frum has made his peace with the fact that smaller government is no longer a basis for conservative dominance. The thesis of his new book, "Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again" (Doubleday), whose message Frum has been taking to Republican groups around the country, is that the Party has lost the middle class by ignoring its sense of economic insecurity and continuing to wage campaigns as if the year were 1980, or 1968.

"If Republican politicians quote Reagan, their political operatives study Nixon," Frum writes. "Republicans have been reprising Nixon's 1972 campaign against McGovern for a third of a century. As the excesses of the 1960s have dwindled into history, however, the 1972 campaign has worked less and less well." He adds, "How many more elections can conservatives win by campaigning against Abbie Hoffman and Bobby Seale? Voters want solutions to the problems of today." Polls reveal that Americans favor the Democratic side on nearly every domestic issue, from Social Security and health care to education and the environment. The all-purpose Republican solution of cutting taxes has run its course. Frum writes, "There are things only government can do, and if we conservatives wish to be entrusted with the management of government, we must prove that we care enough about government to manage it well."

This is a candid change of heart from a writer who, in "Dead Right," called Republican efforts to compete with Clinton's universal-health-coverage plan "cowardly." In the new book, Frum asks, "Who agreed that conservatives should defend the dysfunctional American health system from all criticism?" Well—he did! Frum now identifies health care as the chief anxiety of the middle class. But governing well, in conservative terms, doesn't mean spending more money. It means doing what neither Reagan nor Bush did: mastering details, knowing the options, using caution—that is, taking government seriously. The policy ideas in "Comeback" rely on the market more than on the state and are relatively small-bore, such as a government campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of obesity. As with most such books, the diagnosis is more convincing than the cure.

Frum believes that the Republicans need their own equivalent of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, to make it safe for Republican candidates to tell their interest groups, such as evangelical Christians, what they don't want to hear: that they need to mute their demands if the Party is to regain a majority. At lunch, he said, "The thing I worry about most is if the Republicans lose this election—and if you're a betting man you have to believe they will—there will be a fundamentalist reaction. Not religious—but the beaten party believes it just has to say it louder. Like the Democrats after 1968." He added, "A lot of the problems in the Republican Party will not be fixed."

I asked Frum if the movement still existed. "We'll have people formed by the conservative movement making decisions for the next thirty to forty years," he said. "But will they belong to a self-conscious and cohesive conservative movement? I don't think so. Because their movement did its work. The core task was to stop and reverse, to some degree, the drift of democratic countries after the Second World War toward social democracy. And that was done."

As we started to leave, Frum smiled. "One of Buckley's great gifts was the gift of timing," he said. "To be twenty-five at the beginning and eighty-two at the end! But I'm forty-seven at the end."

When I met David Brooks in Washington, he was even more scathing than Frum. Brooks had moved through every important conservative publication—*National Review*, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, the Washington *Times*, the *Weekly Standard*—"and now I feel estranged," he said. "I just don't feel it's exciting, I don't feel it's true, fundamentally *true*." In the eighties, when he was a young movement journalist, the attacks on regulation and the Soviet Union seemed "true." Now most conservatives seem incapable of even acknowledging the central issues of our moment: wage stagnation, inequality, health care, global warming. They are stuck in the past, in the dogma of limited government. Perhaps for that reason, Brooks left movement journalism and, in 2003, became a moderately conservative columnist for the *Times*. "American conservatives had one defeat, in 2006, but it wasn't a big one," he said. "The big defeat is probably coming, and then the thinking will happen. I have not yet seen the major think tanks reorient themselves, and I don't know if they can." He added, "You go to Capitol Hill—Republican senators know they're fucked. They have that sense. But they don't know what to do. There's a hunger for new policy ideas."

The Heritage Foundation Web site currently links to video presentations by Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham, "challenging Americans to consider, What Would Reagan Do?" Brooks called the conservative think tanks "sclerotic," but much conservative journalism has become just as calcified and ingrown. Last year, writing in *The New Republic*, Sam Tanenhaus revealed a 1997 memo in which Buckley—who had originally hired Brooks at *National Review* on the strength of a brilliant undergraduate parody that he had written of Buckley—refused to anoint him as his heir because Brooks, a Jew, is not a "believing Christian." At *Commentary*, the neoconservative counterpart to *National Review*, the editorship was bequeathed by Norman Podhoretz, its longtime editor, to his son John, whose crude op-eds for the New York *Post* didn't measure up to *Commentary's* intellectual past. A conservative

LOOKING BACK ON THE MUCKLESHOOT RESERVATION FROM GALISTEO STREET, SANTA FE

The bow of a Muckleshoot canoe, blessed
with eagle feather and sprig of yellow cedar,
is launched into a bay. A girl watches
her mother fry venison slabs in a skillet—
drops of blood sizzle, evaporate. Because
a neighbor feeds them, they eat wordlessly;
the silence breaks when she occasionally
gags, reaches into her throat, pulls out hair.
Gone is the father, riled, arguing with his boss,
who drove to the shooting range after work;
gone the accountant who embezzled funds,
displayed a pickup, and proclaimed a winning
flush at the casino. You donate chicken soup
and clothes but never learn if they arrive
at the south end of the city. Your small
acts are sandpiper tracks in wet sand.
Newspapers, plastic containers, beer bottles
fill the bins along this sloping one-way street.

—*Arthur Sze*

journalist familiar with both publications said that what mattered most at the Christian *National Review* was doctrinal purity, whereas at the Jewish *Commentary* it was blood relations: "It's a question of who can you trust, and it comes down to religious fundamentals."

The orthodoxy that accompanies this kind of insularity has had serious consequences: for years, neither *National Review* nor *Commentary* was able to admit that the Iraq war was being lost. Lowry, who received the editorship from Buckley before he turned thirty, told me that he particularly regretted a 2005 cover story he'd written with the headline "WE'RE WINNING." He said, "Most of the right was in lockstep with Donald Rumsfeld. We didn't want to admit we were losing and said anyone who said otherwise was a defeatist. One thing I've loved about conservatism is its keen sense of reality, and that was totally lost in 2006." Last year, *National Review* ran a cover article on global warming, which Lowry, like Brooks, Frum, and other conservatives, listed among the major issues of our time, along with wage stagnation and the breakdown of the family. Although the article, by Jim Manzi, proposed market solutions, the response among some readers, Lowry said, was "'How dare you?' A bunch of people out there don't want to hear it—they believe it's a hoax. That's the head-in-the-sand response."

A similar battle looms between traditional supply-side tax cutters and younger writers like *National Review's* Ramesh Ponnuru, who has proposed greatly expanding the child tax credit—using tax policy not to reduce the tax burden across the board, in accord with conservative orthodoxy, but to help families. These challenges to dogma, however tentative, are being led by Republican constituencies that have begun to embrace formerly "Democratic issues." Evangelical churches are concerned about the environment; businesses worry about health care; white working-class voters are angry about income inequality. But nothing focusses the mind like the prospect of electoral disaster: last November, Lowry and Ponnuru co-wrote a cover story with the headline "THE COMING CATACLYSM."

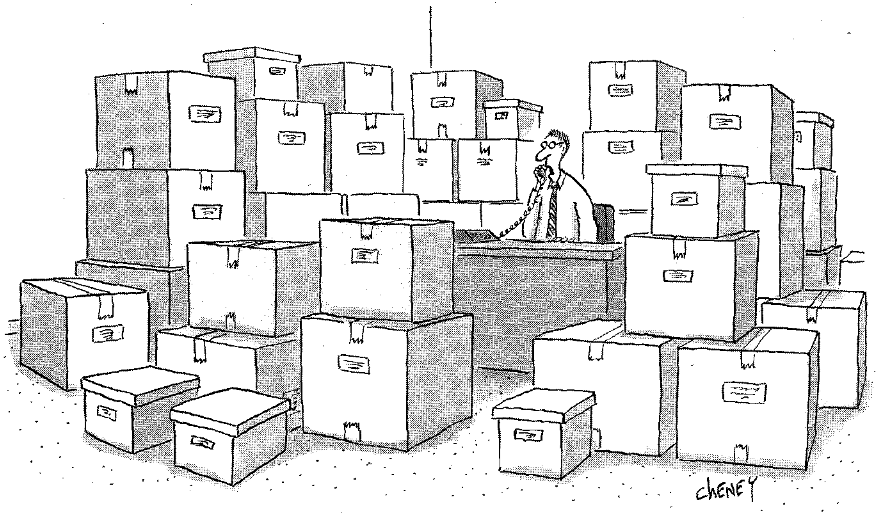
It's probably not an accident that the most compelling account of the crisis was written by two conservatives who are still in their twenties and have made their careers outside movement institutions. Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, editors at the *Atlantic Monthly*, are eager to cut loose the dead weight of the Gingrich and Bush years. In their forthcoming book, "Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream" (Doubleday), Douthat and Salam are writing about, if not for, what they call "Sam's Club Republicans"—members of the white working class, who are the descendants of Nixon's "northern ethnics and southern Protestants" and the Reagan Democrats of the eighties. In their analysis, America is divided between the working class (defined as those without a college education) and a "mass upper class" of the college educated, who are culturally liberal and increasingly Democratic. The New Deal, the authors acknowledge, provided a sense of security to working-class families; the upheavals of the sixties and afterward broke it down. Their emphasis is on the disintegration of working-class cohesion, which they blame on "crime, contraception, and growing economic inequality." Douthat and Salam are cultural conservatives—Douthat became a Pentecostal and then a Catholic in his teens—but they readily acknowledge the economic forces that contribute to the breakdown of families lacking the "social capital" of a college degree. Their policy proposals are an unorthodox mixture of government interventions (wage subsidies for lower-income workers) and tax reforms (Ponnuru's increased child-credit idea, along with a revision of the tax code in favor of lower-income families). Their ultimate purpose is political: to turn as much of the working class into Sam's Club Republicans as possible. They don't acknowledge the corporate interests that are at least as Republican as Sam's Club shoppers, and that will put up a fight on many counts, potentially tearing the Party apart. Nor are they prepared to accept as large a role for government as required by the deep structural problems they identify. Douthat and Salam are as personally remote from working-class America as any élite liberal; Douthat described their work to me as "a data-driven attempt at political imagination." Still, any Republican politician worried about his party's eroding base and grim prospects should make a careful study of this book.

Frum's call for national-unity conservatism and Douthat and Salam's program for "Sam's Club Republicans" are efforts to shorten the lean years for conservatives, but political ideas don't materialize on command to solve the electoral problems of one party or another. They are generated over time by huge social transformations, on the scale of what took place in the sixties and seventies. “They’re not real, they’re ideological constructs,” Buchanan said, “and you can write columns and things like that, but they don’t engage the heart. The heart was engaged by law and order. You reached into people—there was feeling.”

Sam Tanenhaus summed up the 2008 race with a simple formula: Goldwater was to Reagan as McGovern is to Obama. From the ruins of Goldwater’s landslide defeat in 1964, conservatives began the march that brought them fully to power sixteen years later. If Obama wins in November, it will have taken liberals thirty-six years. Tanenhaus pointed out how much of Obama’s rhetoric about a “new politics” is reminiscent of McGovern’s campaign, which was also directed against a bloated, corrupt establishment. In “The Making of the President 1972,” Theodore White quotes McGovern saying, “I can present liberal values in a conservative, restrained way. . . . I see myself as a politician of reconciliation.” That was in 1970, before McGovern was defined as the candidate of “amnesty, abortion, and acid,” and he defined himself as a rigid moralist more interested in hectoring middle Americans than in inspiring them.

Obama, of course, is an entirely different personality in a different time, but the interminable primary campaign has shown his coalition to look very much like McGovern’s: educated, upper-income liberal voters; blacks; and the young. Nixon beat McGovern among the latter even after the Twenty-sixth Amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen; but times have changed so drastically that, according to Pew Research Center surveys, almost sixty per cent of voters under thirty now identify more strongly with the Democrats, doubling the Party’s advantage among the young over Republicans since 2004. And the demographic work of John Judis and Ruy Teixeira in their 2002 book, “The Emerging Democratic Majority,” showed that the McGovern share of the electorate—minorities and educated professionals working in post-industrial jobs—is expanding far faster than the white working class. This was the original vision of a McGovern adviser named Fred Dutton, whose 1971 book, “Changing Sources of Power: American Politics in the 1970s,” cited by Perlstein, foresaw a rising “coalition of conscience and decency” among baby boomers. The new politics was an electoral disaster in 1972, but it may finally triumph in 2008.

If not, it will be because Democrats still can’t win the Presidency without the working-class Americans who remain the swing vote and, this year, are up for grabs more than ever. Hillary Clinton has denied Obama a lock on the nomination by securing large majorities of swing voters, beginning in New Hampshire and culminating last week in West Virginia. It took the Obama campaign months to realize that a 2008 version of the McGovern coalition will barely be sufficient to win the nomination, let alone the general election. The question is how Obama can do better with the crucial slice of the electorate that he hasn’t been able to capture. Recently, he has gone from bowling in Pennsylvania and drinking Bud in Indiana to talking about his single mother, his wife’s working-class roots, and his ardent patriotism on the night of his victory in North Carolina. But the problem can’t be solved by symbols or rhetoric: for a forty-six-year-old black man in an expensive suit, with a Harvard law degree and a strange name, to walk into V.F.W. halls and retirement homes and say, “I’m one of you,” seems both improbable and disingenuous.



“It happened so gradually I never realized I was being put in storage.”

The other extreme—to muse aloud among wealthy contributors, like a political anthropologist, about the values and behavior of the economically squeezed small-town voter—is even more self-defeating. Perhaps Obama’s best hope is to play to his strength, which is a cool and eloquent candor, and address the question of liberal élitism as frontally as he spoke about race in Philadelphia two months ago. He would need to say, in effect, “I know I’m not exactly one of you,” and then explain why this shouldn’t matter—why he would be just as effective a leader for the working and middle class as his predecessors Presidents Roosevelt and Kennedy, who were élites of a different kind. Above all, Obama should absorb what the most thoughtful conservatives already know: that these voters see the economic condition of the country as inextricable from its moral condition.

Last month, I saw John McCain speak in a tiny town, nestled among the Appalachian coal hills of eastern Kentucky, called Inez. He was in the middle of his Time for Action Tour of America’s “forgotten places” (including Selma, Alabama; Youngstown, Ohio; and the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans). It was a transparent effort to stay in the media eye and also to say, as his speechwriter Mark Salter later told me, “I’m not going to run an election like the last couple have been run, trying to grind out a narrow win by increasing the turnout of the base. I don’t want to run a campaign like that because I don’t want to be a President like that. I want to be your President even if you don’t vote for me.” As every new conservative book points out, the Bush-Rove realignment strategy would fail miserably this year, anyway.

Inez is the place where Lyndon Johnson came to declare war on poverty, in 1964. He sat on the porch of a ramshackle, tin-roof house, which still stands (just barely) on a hillside above Route 3, looking a little like a museum of rural poverty in a county that has recently prospered because of coal. McCain was to appear in the county courthouse, on the short main street of Inez, and the middle-aged men I sat with in the second-floor courtroom all remembered Johnson's visit and had nothing but good things to say about his anti-poverty programs. Kennis Maynard, the county prosecutor, a cheerful, thickset man in a blue suit, had saved enough money for law school from a job in the mines that he got with the help of a federal work program. His family was so poor that they were happy to accept government handouts of pork, canned beans, and cheese. The courthouse in which we were sitting was a New Deal project, circa 1938. Maynard, like the other men, like most of nearly all-white Martin County, is Republican—mainly, he said, because of cultural issues like abortion. But Maynard and the others said that McCain had better talk about jobs and gas prices if he wanted to keep his audience.

John Preston, who is the county's circuit-court judge and also its amateur historian, Harvard-educated, with a flag pin on his lapel, said, "Obama is considered an élitist." He added, "There's a racial component, obviously, to it. Thousands of people won't publicly say it, but they won't vote for a black man—on both sides, Democrat and Republican. It won't show up in the polls, because they won't admit it. The elephant's in the room, but nobody will say it. Sad to say it, but it's true." Later, I spoke with half a dozen men eating lunch at the Pigeon Roost Dairy Bar outside town, and none of them had any trouble saying it. They announced their refusal to vote for a black man, without hesitation or apology. "He's a Muslim, isn't he?" an aging mine electrician asked. "I won't vote for a colored man. He'll put too many coloreds in jobs. Colored are O.K.—they've done well, good for them, look where they came from. But radical coloreds, no—like that Farrakhan, or that senator from New York, Rangel. There'd be riots in the streets, like the sixties." No speech, on race or élitism or anything else, would move them. Here was one part of the white working class—maybe not representative, but at least significant—and in an Obama-McCain race they would never be the swing vote. It is a brutal fact, and Obama probably shouldn't even mention it.

McCain appeared to a warm reception. I had seen him in New Hampshire, where he gave off-the-cuff remarks with vigor; when he is stuck with a script, however, he is a terrible campaigner. Looking pallid, he sounded flat, and stumbled over his lines—and yet they were effective lines, ones that Obama would do well to study. "I can't claim we come from the same background," McCain began. "I'm not the son of a coal miner. I wasn't raised by a family that made its living from the land or toiled in a mill or worked in the local schools or health clinic. I was raised in the United States Navy, and, after my own naval career, I became a politician. My work isn't as hard as yours—it isn't nearly as hard as yours. I had an easier start." He paused and went on, "But you are my compatriots, my fellow-Americans, and that kinship means more to me than almost any other association."

McCain mentioned Johnson's visit and the war on poverty, expressing admiration for its good intentions but rebuking its reliance on government to create jobs—rebuking it gently, without the contempt that Reagan would have used. He called for job-training partnerships between business and community colleges, tax deductions for companies bringing telecommunications to rural areas. It was a moderate, reform-minded Republicanism. He didn't use any of the red-meat language that made two generations of white voters switch parties.

"McCain is not a theme guy," David Brooks said. "He reacts—he has moral instinct, which I think is quite a good one." Other conservatives complained to me that he has no ideology at all. "Let's face it," Brooks said. "What McCain's going to do is say, 'I'm not George Bush. I'm not like the Republican Party you knew.' " Most Presidential candidates move to the center once they've locked up the nomination; McCain, however, still has to try to win over the suspicious Republican right, and he recently vowed to appoint only judges who "strictly interpret" the Constitution to the bench. But pledges of fealty to his party's ideological interest groups diminish what's appealing about McCain. "Feeling fraudulent is very debilitating to him," Mark Salter said.

When McCain opened the floor for questions, a woman asked about border security. He replied, to general laughter, "This meeting is adjourned." Another woman asked him to discuss his religious faith, and McCain told a story from his imprisonment, about a generous gesture by a North Vietnamese guard one Christmas Day. I'd heard him tell the same story in New Hampshire; it seemed to be his stock answer, and he hurried through it. Other questions came, about gas prices and jobs going overseas and foreclosures and education costs, and McCain's answers—a summer federal-gas-tax holiday, a cut in the capital-gains tax, charter schools, federal home loans, job-training programs—didn't seem to move either him or his audience very much.

Members of the audience began to appeal to McCain with the old polarizing language, but he refused to take the bait. A state senator asked what he thought about Obama's recent comments on rural voters, religion, and guns. McCain turned the question around. "Let me ask you: Do you think those remarks reflect the views of constituents?"

"I think they reflect the views of someone who doesn't understand this neck of the woods," the state senator replied, to the biggest ovation of the day.

"Yes, those were élitist remarks, to say the least," McCain said quickly, walking away.

Judge Preston had a question. McCain had mentioned Clinton's vote for a million-dollar earmark for a museum in Woodstock, New York. Had he attended the concert? It was an obvious setup for a standard McCain joke, and he seemed positively embarrassed by it. "I'll give my not-so-respectful answer," he said. "I was tied up at the time."

It was a remarkably subdued performance. McCain doesn't try to stir a crowd's darker passions or its higher aspirations. He doesn't present himself as a conservative leader; he is simply a leader. His favorite book, according to Salter, is "For Whom the Bell Tolls," because it's the story of a man who struggles nobly even though he knows the effort is doomed. McCain says to audiences, Here I am, a man in full, take me or leave me. This might be the only kind of Republican who could win in 2008. ♦

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George Packer's blog, Interesting Times.

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

HUNGRY MINDS

Tales from a Chelsea soup kitchen.

BY IAN FRAZIER

The Church of the Holy Apostles, at the corner of Twenty-eighth Street and Ninth Avenue in Manhattan, is a church only two-sevenths of the time. The other five-sevenths—every weekday including holidays, no exception made for weather, fire, or terrorist attack—it is the largest soup kitchen in New York City. It serves an average of about twelve hundred meals a day, though the number often spikes higher; on a recent Columbus Day, the number of meals served was fourteen hundred and ninety-two. As a church, Holy Apostles is a not large and not wealthy parish in the Episcopal Church's Diocese of New York. As a soup kitchen, it has lasted for more than twenty-five years, since back in the first Reagan Administration, and has served more than six million meals.

I know about the soup kitchen because I am one of the teachers of a writers' workshop that meets there after lunch on Wednesdays in the spring. I started the workshop fourteen years ago, with the help of a grant. I wanted to do something with the soup kitchen because I admired the people there and the way it is run and the whole idea of it. There are so many hungers out there; the soup kitchen deals, efficiently and satisfyingly, with the most basic kind. I consider it, in its own fashion, a work of art.

To walk into the church while lunch is going on is to enter one of the city's defining public spaces. The building, which turned a hundred and sixty this year, was declared a New York City Landmark in 1966. It has a high, arched cathedral ceiling supported by cylindrical pillars that rise to Tuscan-style groined arches. Natural light comes into the nave through tall and narrow stained-glass windows whose age and artistry make them rarities in themselves. But as for traditional church fanciness that's about it. Most strikingly, the church has no pews. From the baptismal font, at the back of the church, to the steps of the altar, ninety feet away, no pews or carpet or other fixtures interrupt an open expanse of stone tiles, whose foot-polished smoothness suggests a dance studio or the floor of Grand Central.

People who work for the soup kitchen set up round dining tables and metal folding chairs in the main part of the church every lunchtime. The soup-kitchen guests wait in line on the sidewalk outside, receive meal tickets, file through the serving stations in the Mission House adjoining the church, fill their trays, come into the church, sit down, and eat. The meal, which lasts from ten-thirty to twelve-thirty, takes place in a murmur of dining noises sometimes accompanied by music on the church's piano or organ beneath (if the day is sunny) shafts of stained-glass light. Most guests finish eating in twenty minutes or half an hour and are on their way. Formerly, when the church was not used for dining, you ate in a smaller room in the Mission House and had to be finished in seven and a half minutes. Now you can take your time.

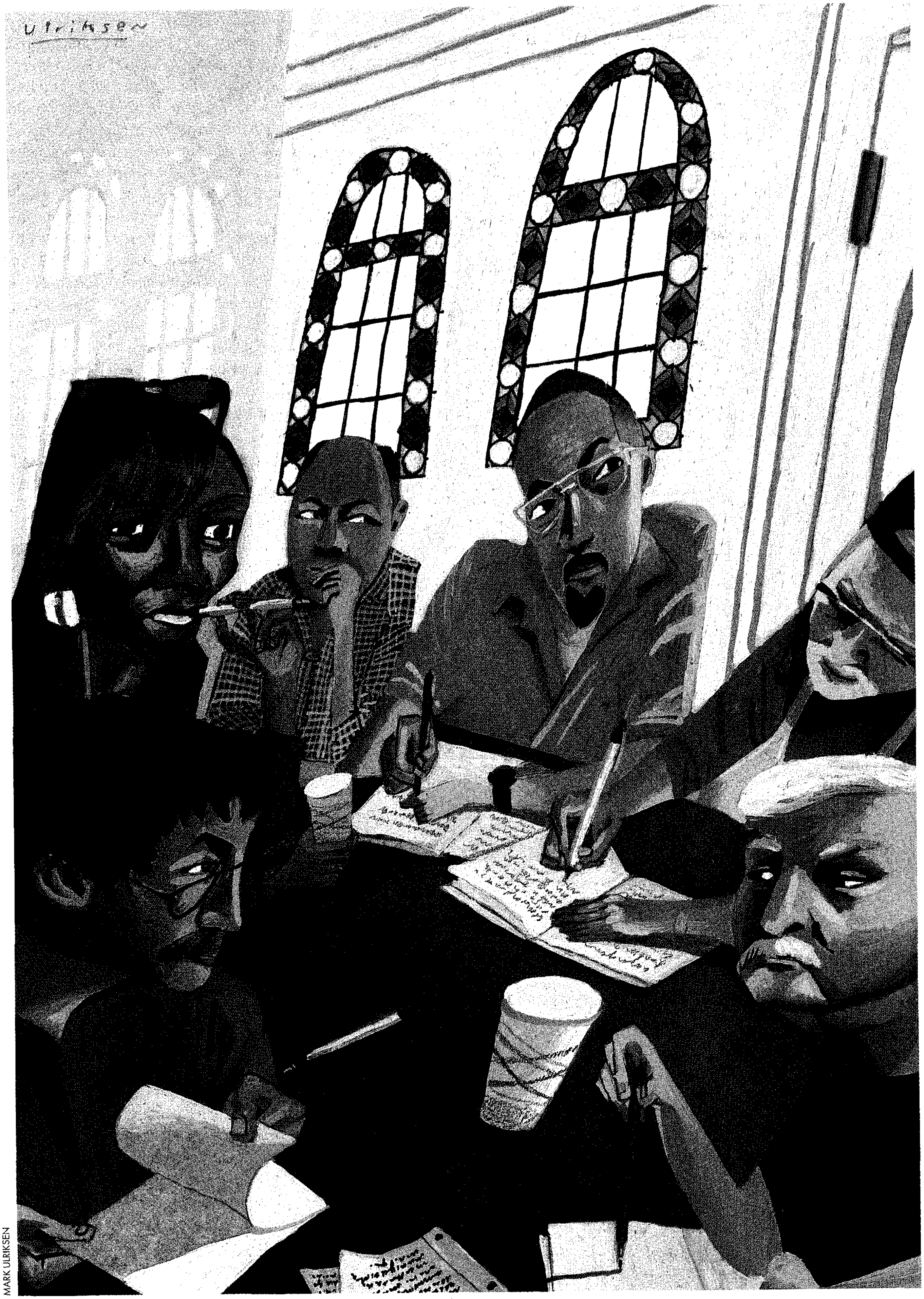
To let all the soup-kitchen guests know that our writers' workshop exists, I sometimes sit during lunch at a little table with a hand-lettered sign and a stack of flyers right by the exit door. Often, I have to clip a pen to the flyers and tape the sign to the table so they won't blow away in the cold drafts from the door. For the two hours I'm there, the stream of people does not stop. Preceding me in the exit line might be tables for representatives of housing advocacy groups, drug- and alcohol-counselling services, domestic-abuse shelters, or (a few years back) Charles, the Condom Man, who passed out free condoms for AIDS prevention with a carny barker's spiel. Because I'm nearest the door, many people wait a moment at my table before heading out into the cold, where some of them will be continuously until they return for lunch the following day.

Some ask about the workshop; most do not. They set their paper cups of hot coffee or tea next to the flyers, along with the orange or the piece of bread they were given on the way out, and they button up, pull their caps over their ears, put on gloves if they have them, re-tie the bags or parcels they brought, and kind of hunch down into themselves, getting ready for the city again.

On really chilly days, they might spend a long time on these details before they go. And then sometimes, after half an hour or so, the same person is again at my table, again buttoning up for outdoors. That means that the person waited in line, filled his tray, ate, and then went through the process over again. There's no rule against going back for seconds; the soup kitchen never turns anybody away. On occasion, I've noticed people who have passed by three or even four times—have eaten that many lunches, in other words. The soup kitchen portions are generous, and the menu for each lunch has been designed to provide a person with enough calories to last twenty-four hours. Most people who eat at the soup kitchen look like anybody. If you sat across from them on the subway, you would never guess how hungry they were.

But there are a lot of hungry people in New York City. Talking about hunger and being hungry are two different things; talk can wait for a convenient moment, but when you're hungry you're hungry right now. Many people on the streets of New York are hungry right now. Every year, the city has been getting hungrier. The New York City Coalition Against Hunger estimates that 1.3 million New Yorkers can't afford to buy

If you take any twelve hundred New Yorkers, you'll naturally come up with a small percentage who can really write.



MARK ULRIKSEN

enough food for themselves and their families all the time. That works out to about one person of every six in the city.

Once when I was sitting at my table by the door, a tall, thin, long-faced black man with deep-set eyes made deeper-looking by the hood of his dark sweatshirt stopped at my table. As he was adjusting his clothing for outside, he looked at my sign. "Writers' *workshop!*" he said, in a tone indicating that he was not impressed by the idea.

"Yes, we meet every Wednesday at twelve-thirty in the narthex, that little room in the front of the church. Would you like to join?" I asked.

"Uh-uh, no," he said. "I ain't doin' no writers' workshop. I *done* that shit before."

"Really? You were in a writers' workshop before?"

"Hell yes I was. And my teacher was a better writer than *you.*"

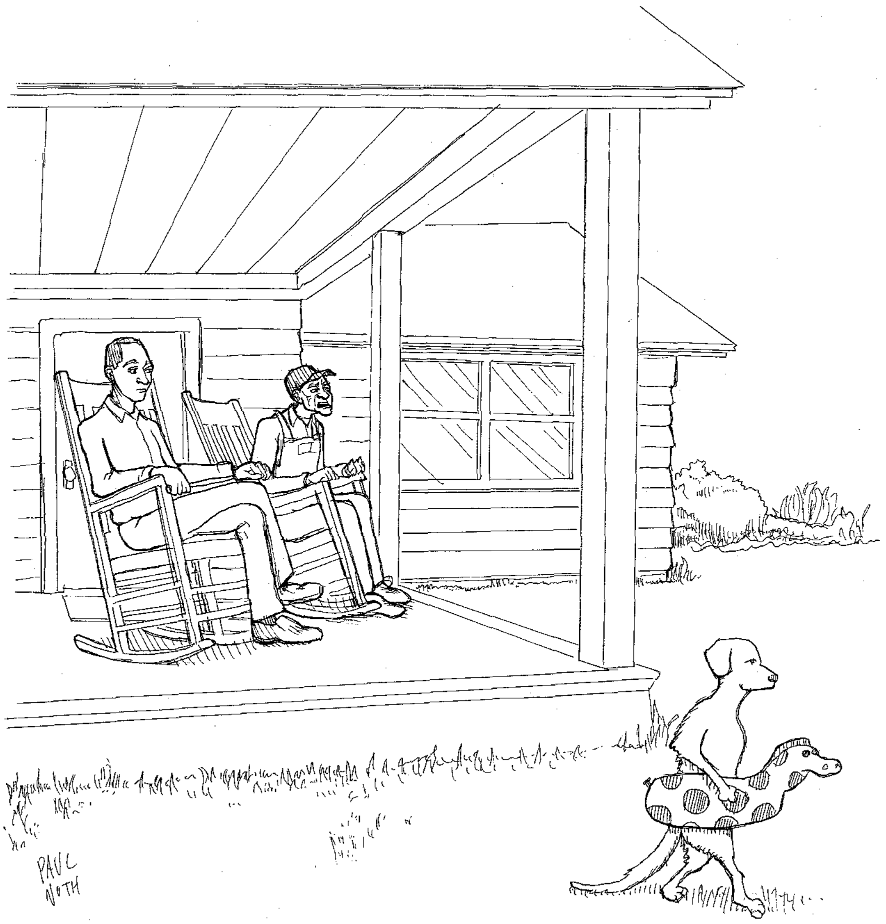
"Oh? What writer was that?"

"John Cheever."

Apparently, the guy had been in a workshop that Cheever taught at the prison in Ossining, back in the seventies. I had met Cheever once, and the guy and I talked about him for a while. I asked the guy what he had learned from the workshop with Cheever, and he said, "Cheever, you understan', he was a brilliant writer. When he wrote something, he always had two things going on at a time. He told us, when you writin', you got this surface thing, you understan', goin' on up *here*"—he moved his left hand in a circle with his fingers spread apart, as if rubbing a flat surface—"an' then once you get that goin' on, now you got to come *under* it"—he brought his right hand under his left, as if throwing an uppercut—"come *under* this thing here that's goin' on up here, you understan'. That was how John Cheever said you write.

"John Cheever had that writers' workshop at Ossining," he continued, "and later he wrote a book about the prison, 'Falconer,' and it was a No. 1 best-seller. I ain't in that book. He got a best-seller from the workshop, and I didn't get shit. I ain't doin' writers' workshops no more."

Most of the people I met were less skeptical. When they saw my sign, they stopped to talk, their lunch having put them in a narrative mood. Almost everybody who talked to me said they had some amazing stories to tell if they could only write them down. Many said that if their lives were made into books the books would be best-sellers. Some few had written books about their lives already, and they produced the manuscripts from among their belongings to show me. If you take any twelve hundred New Yorkers, naturally you'll find a certain number of good musicians, skilled carpenters, gifted athletes, and so on; you'll also come up with a small percentage who can really write. Lots of people I talked to said they were interested in the workshop; a much smaller number actually showed up. Some attended only one session, some came back year after year. In all, over fourteen years, maybe four hundred soup-kitchen guests have participated.



"Storm's a-brewin'."

When I think of them, who stands out? There was Sundance, a hobo, who wrote about etiquette in hobo camps and told me where to go in the Newark train yards if I wanted to hop long-distance freight trains; and David, a bicycle messenger, who wrote a fast-paced poem about his job, titled "In Flight"; and a guy whose name I've forgotten who tried to sell stolen watches in class; and Wendy-Anne, who always wore a white bonnet and who was trying to regain ownership, she said, of her ancestral property in France; and Jay, a soup-kitchen volunteer, who wrote interestingly about the history of this neighborhood, Chelsea, and about a dollar store accessible to wheelchairs; and Roger, a former M.T.A. employee, who came to a class, slept for a while with his head on the table, then sat bolt upright and shouted, "I need some guidance!"; and Ted, who had been a merchant seaman and wrote about being in a bar fight while the song "I've Got a Tiger by the Tail" played on the jukebox; and Donald, a regular in the early years, who penned a book-length memoir about being homeless entirely in blue ballpoint using large block capitals, because of his poor eyesight, and who had an article about the workfare program published on the Op-Ed page of the *Times;* and Charles, a bearded, wild-haired fellow, who said he preferred sleeping outside and resented being picked up in the protective sweeps the cops conducted on cold nights, and who, when I asked where he was sleeping now, replied, "The Italian Embassy," meaning the warm-air grates near the Italian Consulate, uptown.

And William, who wrote about an intergalactic battle among God, various superheroes, and the Alcoholics Anonymous Higher Power; and Tory, whose hilarious piece about her brief stint as a contest-winning backup dancer for Lionel Richie and the Commodores always brought down the house at our public readings; and Carol, who wore a different hat every day, and wrote a great piece about a memorial service at St. Mark's in-the-Bowery when Allen Ginsberg died; and Ron, who after a few years in the workshop began to write his own column for a men's magazine; and John, who after many years of faithful attendance called the church in 2007 to say he couldn't come to the workshop that spring because he was in Antarctica; and Joe, whose stories about his heart attack encapsulated fear in the night; and Norm, a dedicated poet, who wrote a poem entitled "On Achieving Section 8 Housing"; and Jeff, who disappeared one year and returned the next saying that he had been travelling internationally as a player on a homeless men's soccer team (a claim that turned out to be true); and Nelson, who wrote tantalizingly short pieces and then came back, years later, all smiles, having found a job and his own apartment, and brought a camera and took photographs of everybody.

Listing all the writers I remember would take pages. We welcome everybody who wants to attend, with a very few exceptions. Once, I was sitting at the table by the exit with Bob Blaisdell, a teacher and writer who has taught in the workshop since the beginning, when a nattily dressed man with a West Indian accent approached us and asked if we would like him to come to the workshop and write about the nine people he had killed in Jamaica. The man posed the question with a big smile, made more striking by his gold inlays, which had been set in a line rising diagonally across his upper front teeth. I admired Bob for replying that, no, we did not want him to come and write about the nine people he had killed in Jamaica.

"We're going to the park to size up the competition."

• •

Every class, we met in the narthex at twelve-thirty, passed out pens and notebooks, and gave optional topics for that session's writing. Proven topics have been "How I Came to New York," "If I Hadn't Seen It, I Wouldn't Have Believed It," "Shoes," "The Other Me," and "My Best Mistake." A few topics we've had to retire because they're too fraught; "My First Love," for example, was producing too many wrenching tales of first encounters with drugs and alcohol. In each session, people would write for about forty-five minutes. Then we would read the pieces out loud. All the writers were usually kind in listening to and criticizing one another; the common decorum of group-therapy sessions seemed to apply here, and, besides, we were in a church.

Once in a while, classes could be pretty tense nonetheless. Flareups occurred over things as simple as one guy picking up another guy's pen by mistake. The jumpiest times in the class were in 2002 and 2003, after the U.S. had invaded Afghanistan and then Iraq. I recall a day when Charles, the guy who slept at the Italian Embassy, brought in a copy of the *Post* with the headline "KABULLS-EYE!" above a target circle superimposed on a photo of a recently bombed building in Kabul. The headline got us all so jangled we could hardly sit still to write. For people like those in the workshop group, many of whom have pulled their lives together only by means of routine and self-restraint and talking things through, the sight of their own government glorying in chaos shook the ground under their feet.

In the workshop's fourteen years, several participants have died. Pierce, a tall, white-haired man with bushy black eyebrows, was a volunteer at the soup kitchen. Almost every piece he wrote centered on the most important moment in his life—when he attempted suicide by jumping into the East River. After police pulled him out, he quit drinking; many of his pieces ended, "One day at a time." A few years ago when the workshop reconvened, we learned that Pierce had died of a heart attack not long before.

Janice, a stylish, gentle woman in her mid-fifties, also died of heart trouble. At one of our public readings, Janice wore a copper-colored fuzzy sweater and an off-green head scarf and held the whole church silent with a story about the death of her young son. Now Janice's daughter, Thyatira, sometimes attends the workshop, and brings her four-year-old daughter, Janyah. They are the only multigenerational participants we've had so far.

Clarence, a middle-aged Jamaican, always spoke slowly and precisely and wore a jacket and tie. He used to write mini-sermons on quotations from the Bible. When he had written a lot of these pieces, I asked if he wouldn't like to branch out, try some memoir or just describe what he did that day. He politely ignored me. After a few years, he stopped coming and we heard no more about him. Then, in the fall of '02, city employees got in touch with one of the workshop teachers, Susan Shapiro, to say that Clarence had died (another heart attack); searching his belongings for information about next of kin, they had found her business card in his wallet. Evidently no kin were ever located; Clarence was buried in the potter's field.

Susan often handed out her business cards in the workshop, worked with writers outside of class, and helped them get published in newspapers and magazines. Susan knows hundreds of people in the city and throughout publishing and talks so fast she says ten words for every one of mine. In 2004, she co-edited (with the Reverend Elizabeth Maxwell, the associate rector of Holy Apostles) an anthology of writing from the workshop. The book, called "Food for the Soul," is dedicated to Pierce, Janice, and Clarence. The money it earned—some thousands of dollars—mostly went to the contributors, who got a hundred dollars each. A few of the contributors also appeared on the "Today" show and National Public Radio.

I have been part of the workshop almost every year, with a couple of interruptions when my family and I lived in Montana. After four years out there, we moved back east, to New Jersey. One Sunday soon after we returned, I took my daughter into Manhattan to go to museums and reacquaint her with the city generally. She was in fifth grade and curious about everything. At the end of the day, as we were standing in line at the Port Authority waiting for our bus back to the suburbs, a man who had been in the writers' workshop came walking down the line. At each person he stopped and tried to sell a copy of *Street News*. He was wearing layers of semi-disintegrating clothes and he had his hair in short, multidirectional corkscrew dreadlocks. Most of the people he went up to did the usual thing of recoiling slightly and looking away. When he got to us, he recognized me, and we began to talk. I asked how he was doing and he said pretty well—he had written a piece for *Street News* and it had been published recently. He asked if the workshop would be starting again soon, and I said it would, and he said he'd be there. I bought a copy of *Street News* for myself and another for my daughter and said I'd see him in the spring, and we got on our bus. When we arrived home, my wife asked my daughter how she had liked the city. "It was pretty good," she said. "Not much happened. At the bus station, we ran into a friend of Daddy's."

Suddenly, the clouds begin to fly backward very fast, like the view out the window in that movie "The Time Machine," and then they come to a stop and slowly move forward again. It is 1836. Chelsea—the future neighborhood of the Church of the Holy Apostles—is mostly fields. Squatters who have recently emigrated from England and Ireland live along the marshy shoreline of the Hudson River. Some young people who perhaps attend St. Peter's Episcopal on Twentieth Street visit this district and are appalled by the condition of the immigrants and especially by that of their "neglected and isolated" children. To help them, these young people start a Sunday school. With seven hundred and fifty dollars of their own and their friends' money, they erect a schoolhouse on Thirty-sixth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Many people start to attend informal services there on Sundays. Soon the Episcopal Diocese of New York decides that the Sunday school has enough congregants to become an official parish of the church.

A local landowner gives four lots for construction of a church across from his estate on Ninth Avenue. The church's founders decide what it will be called. An architect named Minard LeFever, who has designed other churches in the city, is hired. His usual style, the Gothic Revival, he forgoes in this instance, opting instead for a pared-down, "chaste" version of Tuscan design combined with disparate Italianate elements and incorporating a steeple more than twice the height of the church itself. The building is finished early in 1848. The first service in the building is held in February, 1848. North and south transepts, added 1858, enlarge the structure to its final size. In its stylistic eclecticism combined with simplicity, Holy Apostles is a typical church of the American frontier.

The neighborhood swirls around the church like a slow-moving tornado. In 1850, a "pestilence"—probably cholera—hits the area, and the church cares for the sufferers and holds seventy funerals. Rich people begin to move to Chelsea from downtown, and the church's finances improve. In 1871, the Ninth Avenue elevated train brings its cinders, smoke, and noise to right above the church's front yard. The church sues the El for damages and eventually wins a few thousand dollars. Upper Fifth Avenue becomes fashionable, rich people move out of Chelsea, and the church's finances decline. Waves of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe come to New York City. By and large, they don't join Protestant churches, and those churches begin to close. Holy Apostles hangs on. For years at a time, the church gets by only with the help of contributions from Trinity Episcopal, on Wall Street.

Reformers like Jacob Riis speak at Holy Apostles. In the early nineteen-hundreds, the church inclines to the leftist, progressivist beliefs of the Social Gospel, an affinity that will go on. Still, its congregation is never large. Money remains a problem. Somehow, the church stays open through mixed fortunes during war, depression, and war. Its steeple keeps wanting to fall over and must be shored up expensively. In the twenties, there is a fire. In 1940-41, the Ninth Avenue El is torn down, to the church's relief. After the Second World War, congregants to whom the pastor had sent long letters while they were away in the service drift from the church. High-rise apartment buildings erected by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union for moderate-income people rise above the steeple on several sides. The church looks to the neighborhood for new members and finds some, mostly West Indian and American black people.

Rectors at Holy Apostles come and go. Its first rector, Foster Thayer, quits over the issue of rented pews. In many of the city's churches, families pay rent for their private pews. Thayer thinks that's unchristian and that all pews should be free. The vestry, or church's officers, appreciate his point, but they also have construction loans to pay off. After quitting, Thayer moves to Vermont and soon leaves the ministry entirely. Other Holy Apostles ministers work themselves to exhaustion, take leaves of absence for their health, never return. One or two hold up fairly well. Lucius A. Edelblute, the wartime letter writer, serves from 1918 to 1950. In 1949, he writes the church's centennial history.

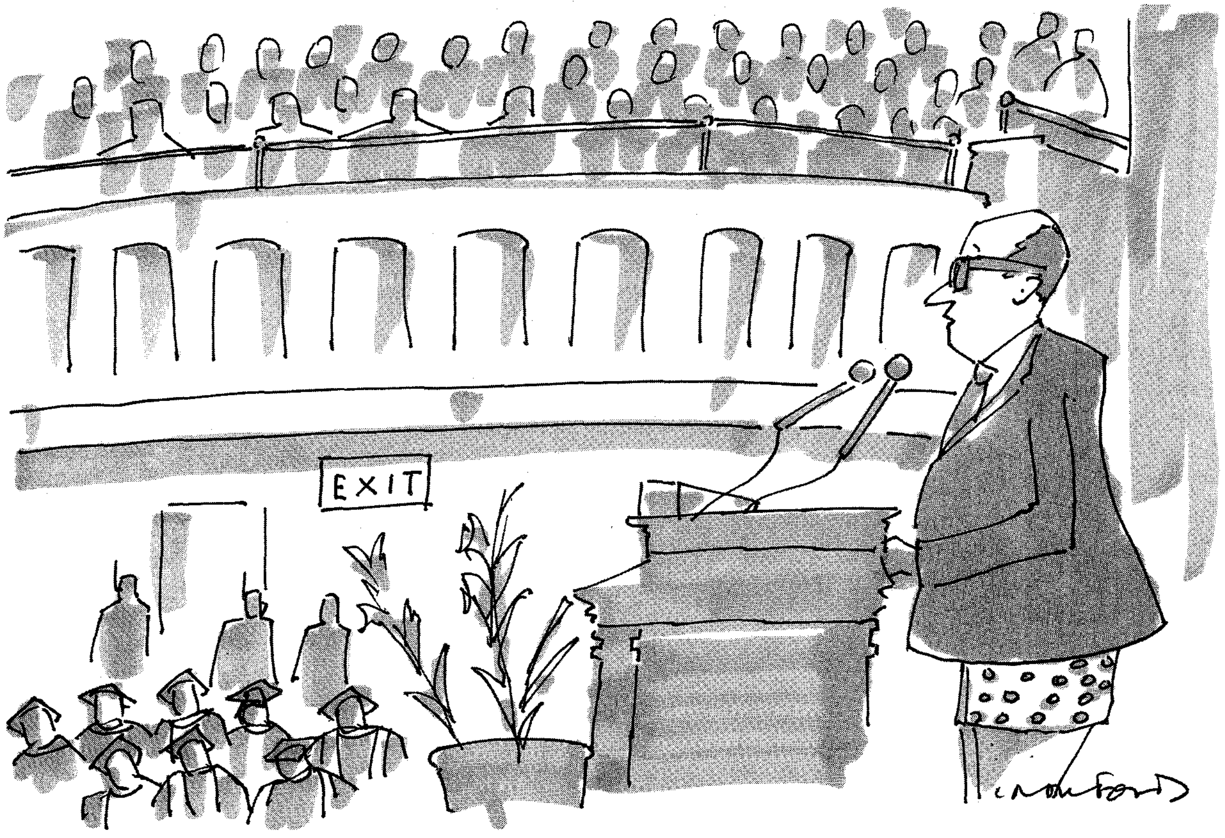
In the sixties, the church becomes a center for left-wing causes, especially opposition to the war in Vietnam. A minister in the seventies welcomes gays and lesbians to Holy Apostles, then decides they must allow Jesus to cure them of their sexual feelings. Turmoil follows. The congregation goes into a decline. The church has no full-time rector from 1975 to 1978.

By 1980, the church is one of the oldest buildings on Ninth Avenue. Its membership has dwindled to about a hundred and twenty-five. Basically, it's dying. Its roof, still the original slate, needs replacing. Leaks have damaged the ceiling, now in danger of falling in. Repairs to the roof would cost half a million dollars. The Right Reverend Paul Moore, Episcopal Bishop of New York, wants to close the church and consolidate its congregation with St. Peter's. Ronald Reagan is elected President. Government money to help the poor is cut, fewer people have public housing, Chelsea's single-room-occupancy hotels close. Homelessness becomes a visible New York City problem. Often, people knock on the church's doors asking for help.

Father Rand Frew, the church's new, young minister, suggests to the congregation that the church should start a soup kitchen. Father Frew thinks big and has a gift for starting programs. His previous church was in Las Vegas; perhaps a bit of gambling instinct is involved in this idea. The congregation wonders where it will come up with the huge amount of money a daily soup kitchen requires, but it gives the O.K. The consensus is that if Holy Apostles is going out of business anyway it might as well do some good before it does.

Father Frew finds fifty thousand dollars and donors of surplus food. He rounds up a head chef, cooking supplies, volunteers. On the soup kitchen's first day, October 22, 1982, it serves about thirty-five meals. Starting then, it establishes its policy of being open every weekday. Its numbers of guests—from the beginning, the people it serves are referred to as guests—increase. Now the problem of repairing the church's roof and ceiling has been simplified: donors who would never contribute to save a dilapidated church with a shrinking congregation are more willing to give to a historic church with a well-run and rapidly growing soup kitchen. More money comes in and the church borrows half a million for the roof repair.

By the mid-eighties, nine hundred or more guests are having lunch at the church's Mission House every day. By 1990, the repairs to the roof are almost done. On April 9th, workmen up in the



"Class of 2008, never let the excuse 'I can't find my pants' stand in the way of your dreams."

roof beams accidentally start a small fire with an acetylene torch. They put the fire out, they think. In the afternoon at quitting time, the workmen leave. A few hours later, the church is holding evening services in the narthex when someone sticks his head in the door and says, "Your church is on fire." In minutes, the roof goes up in flames. The Fire Department comes and puts out the fire. Inside and out, the destruction is immense. Many of the irreplaceable stained-glass windows had to be broken to vent the gases from the fire. That night, the church is blackened, dripping, open to the sky. Nonetheless, the soup kitchen serves lunch in the undamaged Mission House the next day: a cold meal, owing to circumstances—macaroni-and-tuna salad, fruit, and juice. It feeds about nine hundred and fifty.

The church has fire insurance. Repairs of the damage, including installing another new slate roof, fixing the ceiling, and assembling the fragments of the stained-glass windows, will cost about eight million dollars. By now, Father Frew has left, and the rector of the church and executive director of the soup kitchen is William Greenlaw, a manager whose skill with money has acquired him the nickname Father Greenbacks. He consults with Elizabeth Maxwell and the vestry, and they decide to plan the reconstruction so that the soup kitchen can expand into the church itself. What to do about the pews? Take them out—the church stopped renting them a century ago, no money will be lost—and keep the space open for dining. During services, the congregation can just as easily use folding chairs. Everybody agrees about this immediately.

Reconstruction takes four years. When all is finished and the first meal is served in the main church, the guests come in quietly with their trays, unsure about the protocol for eating in a church. Wendy Shepherd, the church's longtime administrative supervisor, watches them and worries that people won't be comfortable eating here, but in a few days the strangeness goes away. The *Times* reports that mid-nineteenth-century pews saved from the fire at Holy Apostles are for sale for four hundred and fifty dollars apiece at a public architectural salvage yard in Brooklyn. Somewhere, the shade of Foster Thayer smiles.

NECK

That isn't done Grabbing your girlfriend's neck
isn't done I mean it is done by god
often enough but not when I'm the girl

or the friend I love you with all my soul
and all my I don't know what else to say
my friendliness and my girlishness

but by god my friend do not grab my neck
Neck with me nestle your neck into mine
I've been watching the necks of the geese

my geese our geese flying over our heads
and I've said goose wander in my chamber
You goose don't be a gander and don't be

a geek Be a Greek be a pagan be
a lover of life of me of my neck
Grab my neck my shoulder or my breast

Today, the church, fully restored, remains the one unchanging landmark in Chelsea. To judge from a photograph of church and churchyard taken in 1880, the fire hydrant next to it on Twenty-eighth Street has also stayed the same.

At night, people sleep on the E train as it makes its long run out into Queens and then back again to Manhattan. They sleep on the stairs of the Twenty-fifth Street entry to the E and C subway station at Eighth Avenue, or in the top stairwell of the building on Nineteenth Street where they once had an apartment, or under the hoardings at the back of the main Post Office building, or on the front steps of a church on Sixteenth, or under sections of the old elevated tracks near Tenth Avenue, or in the vestibule of a twenty-four-hour copy shop on Seventh, or somewhere else in Chelsea or farther away. People used to be able to sleep in Chelsea Park, across the street from the church, but now it and most other neighborhood parks are off-limits at night.

If you find a more official place to stay temporarily, it might be the Rescue Mission, on Lafayette Street, downtown (men only; cots), or the Bellevue Shelter, on Thirtieth (men only; couples assigned elsewhere), or one of the outer-borough shelters. Stays at drop-in centers, like the Oliveri Center, on Thirtieth (women only), or Open Door, on Forty-first, or Peter's Place, on Twenty-third (men and women fifty-five and over only), are intended to be shorter-term. In most drop-in centers, you have to sleep sitting up in a chair, which can cause your legs to swell.

People planning to have lunch at the soup kitchen show up sometimes hours before the church is open in the morning. A few bring all they own loaded on shopping carts, wheeled garment racks, hand trucks, or in the side baskets of bicycles. Their bundles are tied together with yellow nylon rope, cinched with bungee cords, taped with silver duct tape, or packed loose in double or triple plastic shopping bags. One older woman with a weathered face and long brown hair sometimes carries, close at hand among her bags, a big tube of sunblock. Now and then, the loads of belongings include those woven-nylon suitcases, white with broad plaid stripes, which are the people's luggage all over the world. During lunch, the shopping carts and other conveyances are parked in the churchyard, where someone from the soup kitchen keeps an eye on them.

Volunteers are asked to show up by 10 A.M. The soup kitchen needs at least forty volunteers to serve every meal. All kinds of people help out, but Manhattan

but sweetly if you must my sweet goose
or I'll call the police Not that the Greeks
were any better at love than we are

always stabbing at their men and their gods
but my god better than the Romans
and their strikes at the neck their split necks

All they did was say do not do do not
do that and thwack off with their head
So if you ask me what Greek is I say

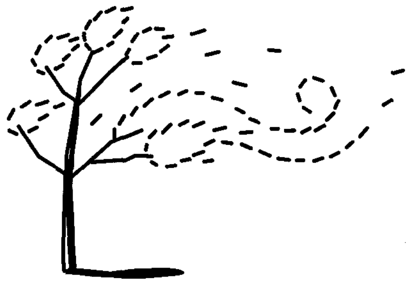
give me a Greek over a Roman
Oh romance romance it's Greek to me
it was Greek to the Romans and to me

to my roaming heart and my Grecian
gods to my friends and my gods and you
you my silly goose and my strangler

—*Sarah Arvio*

retirees are usually the bulk of the volunteers. Some have been doing this almost since the soup kitchen began; Ilona Seltzer, a Chelsea resident, has been volunteering since 1985. School groups volunteer, and Sunday-school classes and Scout troops and the rabbis and members of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (which holds its own services in the church on Friday evenings). Kim, a software designer from Orange County, California, volunteers when she's in the city visiting her aunt and uncle. Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins, longtime Chelsea-ites, have volunteered. Senator Jeff Sessions (Republican of Alabama) and others of the Alabama delegation spent a morning working at the soup kitchen during the Republican National Convention in 2004. Senator Sessions used the photo opportunity that resulted to praise the soup kitchen as the sort of private initiative that naturally takes up the tasks our government should not do and should not have to do—an opinion with which everybody at the soup kitchen disagreed.

Clyde Kuemmerle, the soup kitchen's associate program director, signs in the volunteers and tells them what their jobs will be. Clyde, a bearded man in his early sixties, has a Ph.D. in theatre from the University of Minnesota, and in the past he worked on Broadway plays as a producer, which resembles his present occupation. He carries a walkie-talkie and runs the whole soup kitchen day to day. People sometimes yell at Clyde, but he has great equanimity. Plenty of soup-kitchen guests carry a world of troubles with them, and they may fluctuate in their medications, and for these and other reasons some can be quick to get mad. During almost every lunch, somebody takes offense at somebody else, voices are raised, and people stand up and confront each other. Then Clyde and the employees who work on the floor—Harold McKnight and his brother Prince, Rodney Williams, Olimpo Tlatelpa, among others—come over and intervene. They step between the arguers, they remonstrate with them quietly, and soon the shouting dies down. The way they are completely firm and at the same time completely kind should be studied by the U.N.



The soup kitchen's counselling trailer, which is in the churchyard by the gate where the guests come in, is open five days a week before and after lunch. Jacqueline McKnight, the soup kitchen's assistant counsellor, whom everybody calls Jackie and who is married to Harold, handles the guests' problems with food stamps, disability payments, housing applications, medical referrals, etc. Now and then a person comes to the trailer who is in a crisis at that very moment. One December afternoon, a woman walked into Jackie's office while in the middle of labor. With no time to take her anywhere, Jackie sat her on a chair and called Linda Adams, who works in the church offices, and Clyde. Jackie and Linda comforted the woman and helped her with her breathing while Clyde put some coats on the floor and waited there for the baby. He was shaking because this experience was a first for him. Fortunately, E.M.S. soon showed up, and the E.M.S. guys performed the actual delivery.

The woman, a skinny white lady who had barely even looked pregnant, kept hollering that she didn't want the baby, that she had hoped to leave it in the soup-kitchen bathroom, and that Jackie and Linda could have it. On the spot, they told the woman they would take it. When the baby—a pink and healthy-looking girl—came out, the E.M.S. guys said it was fine with them if Jackie and Linda took her; in fact, in their opinion, that would be a very good idea. First, however, the E.M.S. guys had to follow procedure and take baby and mother to St. Vincent's Hospital. They did, and Jackie and Linda followed in a cab.

But at St. Vincent's the women were not allowed to see the baby, and though they persisted in trying to find out about her, neither Jackie nor Linda ever saw her again. Later, they heard that the baby had been adopted by the family where she had been sent for foster care. Jackie and Linda both think of the little girl often and wonder how she's doing.

To keep going, the soup kitchen needs two million seven hundred thousand dollars a year. It spends more than ten thousand dollars every operating day. For this church, whose congregation still has fewer than two hundred members, that's a lot. About thirty-five per cent of the money needed comes from individual donors who send checks in response to direct-mail solicitations. That income rises and falls, but is generally dependable. Most of the rest comes from foundations and from the city, state, and federal governments, which tend to be less predictable.

Government money for the hungry is a small and ever-shifting stream, moved by political change. City funding disappears under sudden budget pressure, federal poverty funds administered by FEMA are cut nineteen per cent, and a farm bill gets stuck in Congress, with the result that government surplus food suddenly becomes less available. Keeping up with the veerings of government support is a scramble. As for foundations, they are well intentioned and generous, but subject to moods. "Donor burnout" is one of those. Fashions in charitable giving also come and go. Recently, foundation charity has been more focussed on "making a difference," an idea that works against the soup kitchen, which changes people from hungry to not, but invisibly. Also, foundation donors now like to talk about "measurable outcomes"—they expect recipients like the soup kitchen to single out the people who are helped, and measure the improvement in those people's situations over time. Again, that's not something the soup kitchen, with the off-the-street population it serves, can easily do. In the past eighteen months, several major foundation donors have dropped out, and no replacements have been found. There's enough money for now, and for a while, but the future is unclear. The soup kitchen has been in this spot before.

Father Greenlaw, who has overseen the raising of all this money for twenty-five years, will retire at the end of July. He has served longer than any Holy Apostles rector except Lucius Edelblute and Brady Electus Backus (1876-1901), and now he would like not to think about money so much. The twenty-five years have left him remarkably unworn; he has bright green eyes, a full head of hair, and a broad smile that alternates between seraphic and pained. In his quiet office on the third floor of the Mission House, he explains how much the soup kitchen depends on New York's Jewish community ("If the Jews of New York City stopped giving, we'd go out of business"), and how he's had no success raising money among red-state evangelical Christians, and how urban secular mailing lists like the list of subscribers to *The New York Review of Books* or of Channel Thirteen supporters or of members of the North Shore Animal League are much better places to find donors.

In talking about the soup kitchen, Father Greenlaw generally does not mention Jesus. That's only natural, given the ecumenical nature of the enterprise. Instead, he describes the work of feeding the hungry in terms that people are likely to agree on regardless of religious belief or unbelief. He talks about the joy of being alive in this sacred space, of sharing a meal with other people in a beautiful landmarked building, of seeing in the people who come to the soup kitchen "a window into what makes humanity human, into the deepest levels of being."

The soup kitchen never proselytizes or hands out religious literature. But in the church offices upstairs in the Mission House the serene and genteel and somewhat fraught atmosphere of modern Episcopalianism prevails. There is, of course, the pervading aroma of coffee, the denomination's secular wine. Elizabeth Maxwell, whose fresh-faced good looks add emphasis to her strong preaching, has been with the church and the soup kitchen for nineteen years. Liz, as she's called, has done every job from big-dollar fund-raising and counselling to serving and cleanup; usually, every fourth Sunday she also delivers a sermon. In her work, she expects surprises and is undismayed by them. Once, she told me, she was in the trailer counselling a man who said he had been rejected by every homeless shelter he had gone to. She couldn't figure out why this should be, and, as she was puzzling it out, she saw a rustling in the guy's shirt, and then a large snake stuck its head from between two of his shirt buttons and looked at her. The snake was his pet, and shelters don't allow pets. She persuaded the man to return the snake to the exotic-pet store where he got it.

When I pressed Liz about the specifically religious inspiration that applies

here, she said, "Well, we do this because Jesus said to feed the hungry. There's no more to it than that. Jesus told us to take care of the poor and the hungry and those in prison. In Matthew 25 he says, 'As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me.' In all the intricacies of scriptural interpretation, that message—feed the hungry—couldn't be more clear. Those of us who worship at Holy Apostles feel we have a Sunday-Monday connection. The bread and wine of the Eucharist that we share with one another on Sunday become the food we share with our neighbors during the week. We believe that our job as Christians is to meet Jesus in the world. We meet him, unnamed and unrecognized, in the guests who come to the soup kitchen every day."

After the last session of the writers' workshop every year, there's a public reading at the church. We put together an anthology of the best of or all of that year's work (typed into final form by our poet/typist, Alice Phillips), and then we get the anthology copied and spiral-bound at the same nearby copy shop in whose lobby one or two soup-kitchen guests sometimes spend the night. Participants read from a lectern up front, and the audience, which usually numbers about seventy-five or a hundred, listens on folding chairs.

Sometimes as many as eighteen or twenty people read their pieces. With that many, we try to keep each reading short, but things happen as they happen. The pieces range from poetry to personal history to novel excerpts to science fiction to exercises in Hegelian philosophy. We have an informal rule that the reader must only read, and not digress into impromptu explanations of what he or she is reading, but that rule is sometimes overlooked. On occasion, people have brought tape recorders to play music accompanying or introducing what they read. Sometimes people sing. Tory, the writer who did the piece about being a backup dancer for the Commodores, has a song she wrote about the soup kitchen. The sound of a single voice, singing or reading, as it rises to the vaulted beams of the church can lift you almost off the ground.

CENTER BANK
SIPRESS

"We've got borrower's remorse."

• •

When the reading is over, everybody gets something to eat—there's a spread of sandwiches and soft drinks provided by the soup kitchen—and the writers and the audience mingle. The people who attend the reading may be Holy Apostles parishioners, soup-kitchen donors, editors, arts administrators, students from other writing programs, clergy of various kinds, curious passersby. Soup-kitchen alumni from workshops in past years sometimes show up and fill us in on where they are and what they're doing now. Sometimes we talk about people from past workshops whom we haven't seen for a while, or about the ones who came only a few times and then were never seen again—names like Lisa, Wayman, Smokey, White Mike, Coleman, Rashid, Blue, Luis, Rosa . . . The alchemy of writing gives everybody who's been in the workshop an extra dimension: along with possessing a name and a face, each is also the particular person who wrote whatever. Somehow, writing even a few lines makes the person who does it more substantial and real. In geometric terms, it's like the difference between being a point and being a plane.

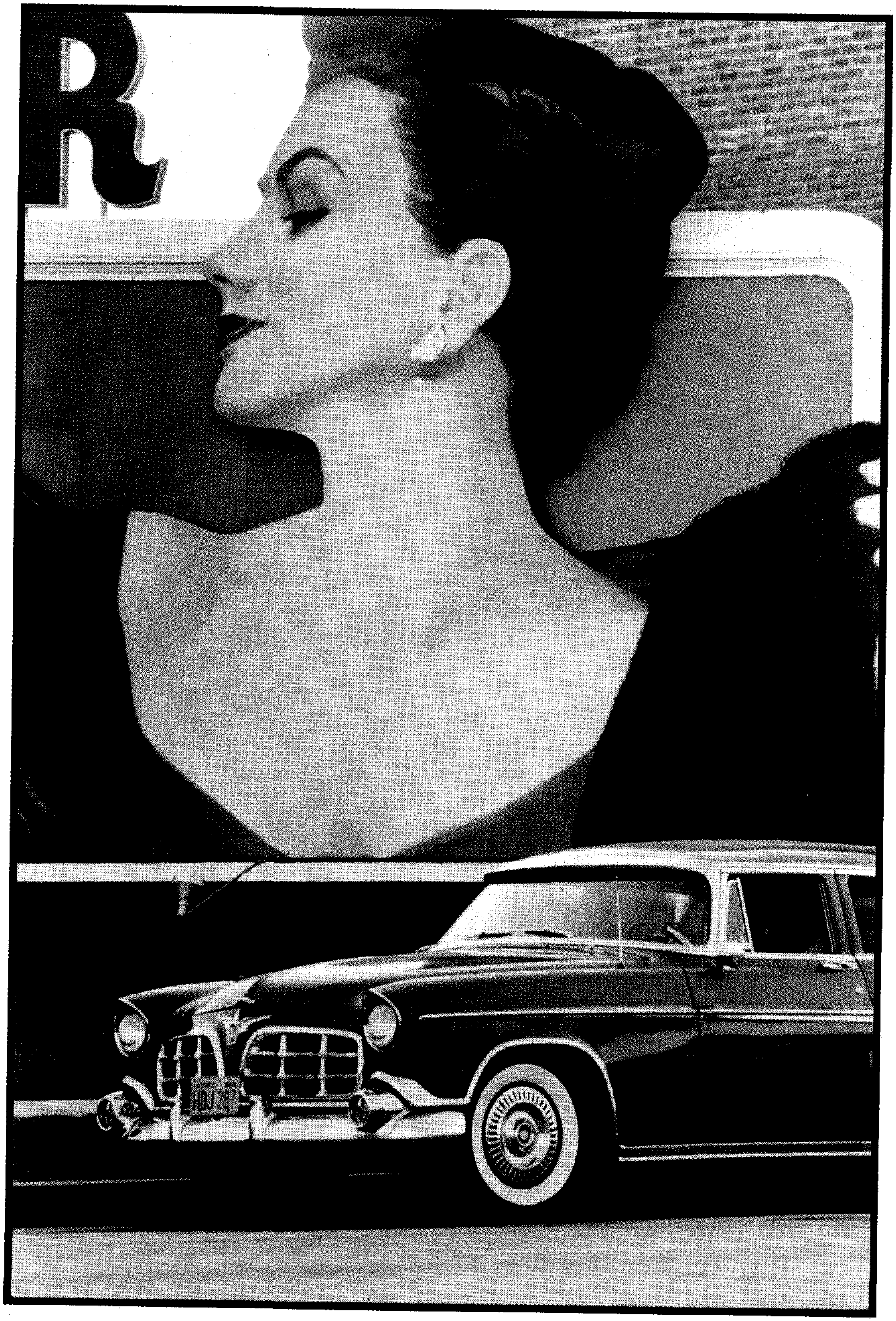
Usually, the reading is on a Wednesday evening in late May. With luck, the weather is mild, and the church's front doors are open. People arrive dressed up, and some of the soup-kitchen staff are in white shirts and black bow ties. The ambient New York City air comes in; you can imagine that the floor of the church, the pavement of Ninth Avenue, the asphalt in Chelsea Park, and the shiny surface of the Hudson River a few blocks away are all connected, one continuous terrestrial floor. As the evening advances and the sunset fades, the lights inside the church brighten. It's a benign time of day to be in a church, or any public space open to the evening. For a moment, the whole city seems to flow in with the air. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with Ian Frazier.

FICTION

THE FULL GLASS

BY JOHN UPDIKE



Approaching eighty, I sometimes see myself from a little distance, as a man I know but not intimately. Normally I have no use for introspection. My employment for thirty years, refinishing wood floors—carried on single-handedly out of a small white truck, a Chevrolet Spartan, with the several sizes of electric sanders and the belts and disks of sandpaper in all their graded degrees of coarseness and five-gallon containers of polyurethane and thinner and brushes ranging from a stout six-inch width to a diagonally cut two-inch sash brush for tight corners and jigsaw-fitted thresholds—has conditioned me against digging too deep. Balancing in a crouch on the last dry boards like a Mohawk steel walker has taught me the value of the superficial, of that wet second coat glistening from baseboard to baseboard. All it needs and asks is twenty-four undisturbed hours to dry in. Some of these fine old New England floors, especially the hard yellow pine from the Carolinas that was common in the better homes a hundred years ago, but also the newer floors of short tongued pieces of oak or maple, shock you with their carefree gouges and cigarette burns and the black scuff marks synthetic soles leave. Do people still give that kind of party? I entered this trade, after fifteen years in a white-collar, smooth-talking line of work, as a refugee from romantic disgrace, and abstain from passing judgment, even on clients arrogant enough to schedule a dinner party six hours after I give their hall parquet the finish coat.

But, now that I'm retired—the sawdust gets to your lungs, and the fumes get to you and eat away your sinuses, even through a paper mask—I watch myself with a keener attention, as you'd keep an eye on a stranger who might start to go to pieces any minute. Some of my recently acquired habits strike me as curious. At night, having brushed my teeth and flossed and done the eyedrops and about to take my pills, I like to have the water glass already full. The rational explanation might be that, with a left hand clutching my pills, I don't want to fumble at the faucet and simultaneously try to hold the glass with the right. Still, *it's more than a matter of convenience.* There is a small but distinct pleasure, in a life with most pleasures levelled out of it, in having the full glass there on the white marble sink-top waiting for me, before I sluice down the anti-cholesterol pill, the anti-inflammatory, the sleeping, the calcium supplement (my wife's idea, now that I get foot cramps in bed, somehow from the pressure of the top sheet), along with the Xalatan drops to stave off glaucoma and the Systane drops to ease dry eye. In the middle of the night, on the way to the bathroom, my eye feels like it has a beam in it, not a mote but literally a *beam*—I never took that image from the King James Version seriously before.

The wife keeps nagging me to drink more water. Eight glasses a day is what her doctor recommended to her as one of those feminine beauty tricks. It makes me gag just to think about it—eight glasses comes to half a gallon, it would bubble right out my ears—but that healthy sweet swig near the end of the day has gotten to be something important, *a tiny piece that fits in:* the pills popped into my mouth, the full glass raised to my lips, the swallow that takes the pills down with it, all in less time than it takes to tell it, but tasting of bliss.

The bliss goes back, I suppose, to moments of thirst satisfied in my childhood, five states to the south of this one, where there were public drinking fountains in all the municipal buildings and department stores, and luncheonettes would put glasses of ice water on the table without your having to ask, and drugstores served Alka-Seltzer up at the soda fountain to cure whatever ailed you, from hangover to hives. I lived with my grandparents, a child lodged with old people thanks to the disruptions of the Depression, and their house had a linoleum floor and deep slate sinks in the kitchen, and above the sinks long-nosed copper faucets tinged by the green of oxidation. A child back then had usually been running from somewhere or other and had a great innocent thirst—running, or else pumping a fat-tired bicycle, imagining it was a dive-bomber about to obliterate a Jap battleship. Filling a tumbler with water at the old faucet connected you with the wider world. Think of it: pipes running through the earth below the frost line and up unseen from the basement right through the walls to bring you this transparent flow, which you swallowed down in rhythmic gulps—down what my grandfather called, with that twinkle he had, behind his bifocals, "the little red lane." The copper would bead with condensation while you waited for the water to run cold enough.

The automobile garage a block away from my grandparents' back yard had the coldest water in town, at a bubbler just inside the overhead sliding doors. It made your front teeth ache, it was so cold. Our dentist, a tall lean tennis player already going bald in his thirties, once told me, after extracting an abscessed back molar of mine when I was fifteen, that no matter what else happened to me dentally I would have my front teeth till the day I died. Now, how could he know that just by looking every six months into a mouth where a Pennsylvania diet of sugar doughnuts and licorice sticks had already wreaked havoc? *But he was right.* Slightly crooked though they are, I still have my front teeth, the others having long since gone under to New England root canals and Swedish implantology. I think of him, my aboriginal dentist, twice a day when I do my brushing. He was the beloved town doctor's son, and had stopped short at dentistry as a kind of rebellion. Tennis was really his game, and he made it to the county semifinals at least twice, before dropping over with a heart attack in his forties. In those days there was no such thing as a heart bypass, and we didn't know much about flossing, either.

The town tennis courts were handy to his office, right across the street—a main avenue, with trolley tracks in the middle that would take you in twenty minutes the three miles into the local metropolis of eighty thousand working men and women, five first-run movie theatres, and a surplus of obsolescing factories. The courts, four of them, were on the high-school grounds, at the stop where my grandmother and I, back from my piano lesson or buying my good coat for the year, would get off the trolley, to walk the rest of the way home because I was sure I was about to throw up. She blamed the ozone: according to her, the trolley ran on ozone, or generated it as a by-product. She was an old-fashioned country woman who used to cut dandelions out of the school grounds and cook the greens into a disgusting stew. There was a little trickling creek on the edge of town where she would gather water-

ELLIOTT ERWITT/MAGNUM

cress. Farther still into the countryside, she had a cousin, a man even older than she, who had a spring on his property he was very proud of, and would always insist that I visit.

I disliked these country visits, so full, I thought, of unnecessary ceremony. My great-cousin was a dapper chicken farmer who by the time of our last visits had become noticeably shorter than I. He had a clean smell to him, starchy with a touch of liniment, and a closeted mustiness I notice now on my own clothes. With a sort of birdy animation he would faithfully lead me to the spring, down a path of boards slippery with moss from being in the perpetual damp shade of the droopy limbs of a great hemlock there. In my memory, beyond the shadows of the hemlock the spring was always in a ray of sunlight. Spidery water striders walked on its surface, and the dimples around their feet threw interlocking golden-brown rings onto the sandy bottom. A tin dipper rested on one of the large sandstones encircling the spring, and my elderly host would hand it to me, full, with a grin that was all pink gums. He hadn't kept his front teeth.

I was afraid of bringing a water strider up to my lips. What I did bring up held my nostrils in the dipper's wobbly circle of reflection. The water was cold, tasting brightly of tin, but not as cold as that which bubbled up in a corner of that small-town garage, the cement floor black with grease and the ceiling obscured by the sliding-door tracks and suspended wood frames holding rubber tires fresh from Akron. The rubber overhead had a smell that cleared your head the way a bite of licorice did, and the virgin treads had the sharp cut of metal type or newly ironed clothes. That icy water held an ingredient that made me, a boy of nine or ten, eager for the next moment of life, one brimming moment after another.

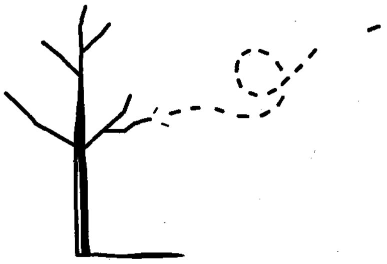
Thinking back, trying to locate in my life other moments of that full-glass feeling, I recall one in Passaic, New Jersey, when I still wore a suit for work, which was selling life insurance to reluctant prospects. Passaic was out of my territory, and I was there on a stolen day off, with a woman who was not my wife. She was somebody else's wife, and I had a wife of my own, and that particular fullness of our situation was in danger of breaking over the rim. But I was young enough to live in the present, thinking the world owed me happiness. I rejoiced, to the extent of being downright dazed, in the female presence beside me in the rented automobile, a red Dodge coupe. The car had just a few miles on it and, as unfamiliar automobiles do, seemed to glide effortlessly at the merest touch of my hand or foot. My companion wore a broad-shouldered tweedy fall outfit I had never seen on her before; its warm brown color, flecked with pimento red, set off her thick auburn hair, done up loosely in a twist behind—in my memory, when she turned her head to look through the windshield with me, whole loops of it had escaped the tortoiseshell hair clip. We must have gone to bed together at some point in that day, but what I remember is being with her in the cave of the car, proudly conscious of the wealth of her hair and the width of her smile and the breadth of her hips, and then in my happiness jauntily swerving across an uncrowded, sunny street in Passaic to seize a metered parking space along the left-hand curb.

A policeman saw the maneuver and before I could open the driver's door was standing there. "Driver's license," he said. "And car registration."

My heart was thumping and my hands jumping as I rummaged in the glove compartment for the registration, yet I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. The cop saw it there and it must have further annoyed him, but he studied the documents I handed him as if patiently mastering a difficult lesson. "You crossed over onto the left side of the street," he explained at last. "You could have caused a head-on collision."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I spotted the parking space and saw no traffic was coming. I wasn't thinking." I had forgotten one of the prime axioms of driving: a red car attracts the police. You can get away with almost nothing in a red car.

"Now you're parked illegally, headed the wrong way."



"Is that illegal? We're not from Passaic," my passenger intervened, bending down low, across my lap, so he could see her face. She looked so terrific, I felt, in her thick shoulder pads and pimento-flecked wool, that another man must understand and forgive my intoxication. Her long oval hands, darting up out of her lap; her painted lips, tensed avidly in the excitement of argument; her voice, which slid past me almost palpably, like a very fine grade of finish sandpaper, caressing away my smallest imperfections—the policeman must share my own amazed gratitude at what she did, for me and my prick, with this array of erotic instruments.

He handed the documents back to me without a word, and bent down to say past my body, "Lady, you don't cut across traffic lanes in Passaic or anywhere else in the United States to grab a parking space heading the wrong way."

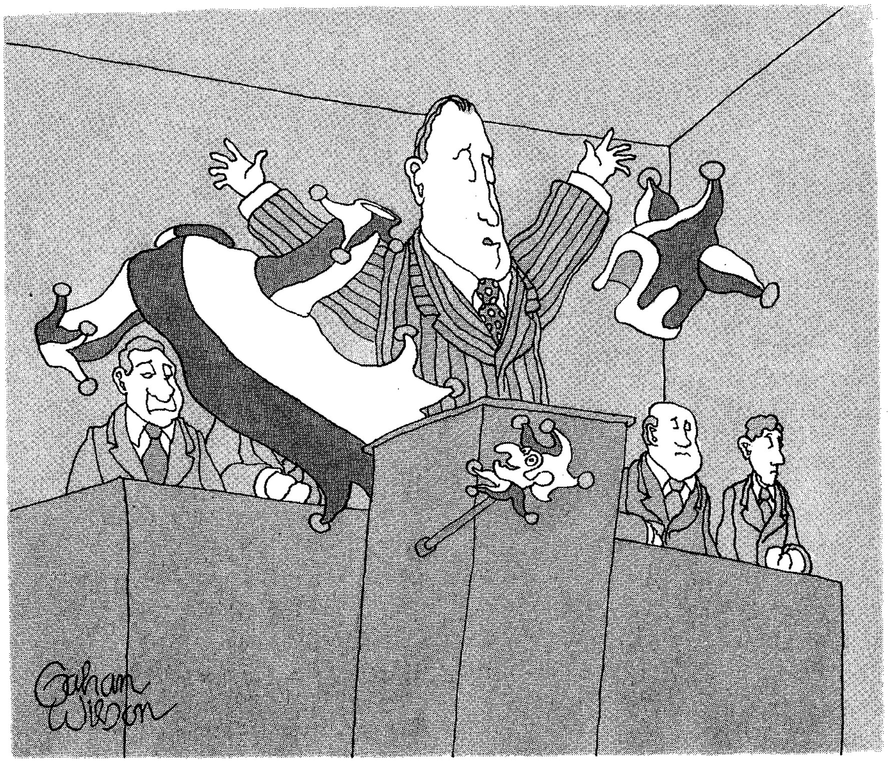
"I'll move the car," I told him, and unnecessarily repeated, "I'm sorry." I wanted to get going; my sense of fullness was leaking away.

My companion took a breath to tell the cop something, perhaps word of some idyllic town, back in Connecticut, where we came from, where such a maneuver was perfectly legal. But my body language may have communicated to her a wish that she say nothing more, for she stopped herself, her lips parted as if holding a bubble between them.

The policeman, having sensed her intention and braced to make a rejoinder, silently straightened up into his full frowning dignity. He was young, but it wasn't his youth that impressed me; it was his uniform, his badge, his authority. We were all young, relatively, as I look back at us. It has taken old age to make me realize that the world exists for young people. Their tastes in food and music and clothing are what the world is catering to, even while they are imagining themselves victims of the old.

The officer dismissed me with "O.K., buddy." Perhaps in deference to my deranged condition, he added, "Take it easy."

The lady and I were not young enough to let our love go, the way teen-agers do, knowing another season is around the corner. We returned to our Connecticut households unarrested, and persisted in what my grandfather would have called evildoing until we were caught, with the usual results: the wounded wife, the seething husband, the puzzled and frightened children. She got a divorce, I didn't. We both stayed in town; her husband went to the city to survey his new prospects. We entered upon an awkward afterlife of some ten years, meeting at parties, in the supermarket, at the playground. She kept looking terrific; woe had carved a few pounds off her frame. It was a decade of national carnival. At one Christmas party, I remember, she wore red hot pants and green net stockings, with furry antlers on a headband and a red ball, alluding to Rudolph the Reindeer's nose, stuck in the middle of her heart-shaped face.



"But enough of levity."

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Parties are theatre in Connecticut bedroom towns, and the wife and I did nothing to make her performances easier, the wife giving her the cold shoulder, and I sitting in a corner staring steelily, still on fire. She had taken on a new persona, a kind of fallen-woman persona, laughing, brazen, flirting with every man the way she had with that cop in Passaic. I took a spiteful pleasure in watching her, at my remove, bump like a pinball from one unsuccessful romance to another. It enraged me when one would appear to be successful. I couldn't bear imagining it—the nakedness I had known, the little whimpers of renewed surprise I had heard. She brought these men to parties, and I had to shake their hands, which seemed damp and bloated to me, like raw squid touched in the fish market.

Our affair had hurt me professionally. An insurance salesman is like a preacher—he reminds us of death, and should be extra earnest and virtuous, as payback for the investment he asks. As an insurance agent I had been proficient and tidy in filling out the forms but less good in tipping the customers into the plunge that would bring a commission. The wife and I moved to a state, Massachusetts, where nobody knew us and I could work with my hands. We had been living there some fifteen years when word came from Connecticut that my former friend—her long looping hair, her broad bright smile, her gesturing oval hands—was dying, of ovarian cancer. When she was dead, I rejoiced, to a degree. Her death removed a confusing presence from the world, an index to its unfulfilled potential. There. You see why I am not given to introspection. Scratch the surface, and ugliness pops up.

Before we were spoiled for each other, she saw me as an innocent, and sweetly tried to educate me. With her husband's example in mind, she told me I must learn to drink more, as if liquor were medicine for grownups. She told me the way to cure a cold was to drink it under. Rather shyly, early in our love life, she told me my orgasms told her that this was important for me. "But isn't it for everybody?" I asked.

She made a wry mouth, shrugged her naked shoulders slightly, and said, "No. You'd be surprised." There was a purity, a Puritan clarity, to her teaching, as she sought to make me human. At some point in the ungainly aftermath of our brief intimacy, she let me know—for I used to seek her out at parties, to take her temperature, as it were, and to receive a bit of the wisdom a love object appears to possess—how I should have behaved to her if I "had been a gentleman." *If I had been a gentleman:* it was a revelatory slur. I was not a gentleman, and had no business putting on a suit each morning and setting off to persuade people wealthier than I to invest in the possibility of their own deaths. I had begun to stammer on the mollifying jargon: "in the extremely unlikely event" and "when you're no longer in the picture" and "giving your loved ones financial continuity" and "let's say you live forever, this is still a quality investment."

My clients could sense that to me death was basically unthinkable, and they shied away from this hole in my sales pitch. Not being a gentleman, I could move to a new state and acquire a truck and heavy sanders and master the modest science of penetrating slow-drying sealers, steel-wool buffer pads, and alkyd varnishes. Keep a wet edge to avoid lap marks, and don't paint yourself into a corner. Brush with the grain, apply your mind to the surface, and leave some ventilation if you want to breathe. Young men now don't want to go into it, though the market for such services keeps expanding with gentrification, because everybody wants to be gentry. Toward the end, I had so many clamoring clients that retiring was the only way I could escape them, whereas selling insurance had always been, for me at least, an uphill push.

People are more concerned about the floors they walk on than the loved ones they leave behind.

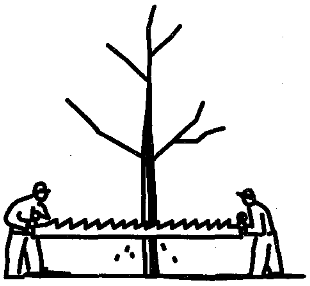
Another curious habit of mine can be observed only in December, when, in the mid-sized sea-view Cape Ann Colonial the wife and I moved to over thirty years ago, I run up on the flagpole five strands of Christmas lights, forming a tent shape that at night strongly suggests the festoons on an invisible tree. I have rigged two extension cords to connect with an outside spotlight so the illusion can be controlled from an inside switch. When, before heading up to the bedroom—"climbing the wooden hill," my grandfather used to say—I switch it off, I could do it without a glance outdoors, but in fact I move to the nearby window with my arm extended, my fingers on the switch, *so that I can see the lights go out.*

In one nanosecond, the drooping strands are burning bright, casting their image of a Christmas tree out into the world, and in the next, so quick that there seems no time at all while the signal travels along the wires from the switch, the colored, candle-flame-shaped bulbs—red, orange, green, blue, white—are doused. I keep imagining, since a pair of hundred-foot extension cords carry the electrons across the yard, through the bushes and frozen flower beds, that I will perceive a time lag, as with a lightning flash and subsequent thunder. But no; the connection between the lights and my hand on the switch appears instantaneous. The lights are there, imprinting the dark with holiday cheer, and then are not. I need to see this instant transformation occur. I recognize something unhealthy in my need, and often vow beforehand just to touch the switch and forgo peeking. But always I break my vow. It's like trying to catch by its tail the elusive moment in which you fall asleep. I think that, subconsciously, I fear that if I don't look the current will jam and reverse, and it is I who will die, and not the lights.

The wife and I are proud of our homemade Christmas tree. We see it loom vividly from the beach below and, stupid as children, imagined we could even see it from Marblehead, eight miles away. But, though we took along our younger son's telescope—abandoned in his room, with all his toys and posters and science fiction and old *Playboys*—we couldn't make out our festooned flagpole at all, amid so many other shore lights. Our faces hurt in the December wind; our eyes watered. What we, after much searching, thought might be our illusion of a tree was a blurred speck in which the five colors and the five strands had merged to a trembling gray as slippery in the telescope as a droplet of mercury.

My hoping to see the current snake through the extension cords possibly harks back to my fascination, as a boy, with pathways. I loved the idea of something *irresistibly travelling along a set path*—marbles rolling down wooden or plastic troughs, subway trains hurtling beneath city streets, water propelled by gravity through underground pipes, rivers implacably tumbling and oozing their way to the sea. Such phenomena gave me a secret joy to contemplate, and, with the lessening intensity that applies in my old age to all sensations, they still do. They appeal, perhaps, to a bone-deep laziness of mine, a death wish. My favorite moment in the floor-finishing business is getting out the door and closing it, knowing that all that remains is for the polyurethane to dry, which will happen without me, *in my absence.*

Another full moment: beginning in kindergarten, all through grade school and high school, I was in love with a classmate I almost never spoke to. Like marbles in parallel troughs we rolled down the years toward graduation. She was popular—a cheerleader, a star hockey player, a singer of solos in school assemblies—with many boyfriends. She had big breasts on a lean body. My small-town grandparents had kept their country connections, and through them I was invited to a Maytime barn dance five miles out of town. Somehow I got up my nerve and invited this local beauty to go with me, and she absorbed her surprise and surprisingly accepted. Perhaps, reigning so securely in our small town, she was amused by the idea of a barn dance. The barn was as big as a church, and last harvest's hay bales were stacked to the roof in the side mows. I had been to barn dances before, with my country cousins, and knew the calls. Bow to your partner. Bow to your corner. All hands left. Women like all that, it occurs to me this late in life—connections and combinations, *contact.* As she got the hang of it, her trim waist swung into my hand with the smart impact of a drumbeat, a football catch, a layup off the reverberating backboard. I felt her moist sides and the soft insides beneath her rib cage, all taut in the spirit of the dance. Sexual intercourse for a female has always been hard for me to picture, but it must feel to be all about *you,* at the center of everything. She might have said yes to me before, if I had asked. But that would have spilled her, for me, into too much reality.



From a geographical standpoint, my life has been a slow crawl up the Eastern Seaboard. The wife and I joke that our next move is to Canada, where we'll get the benefits of universal health care. A third curious habit I've fallen into is that, when I get into bed at night, having been fending off sleep with a magazine and waiting in vain for the wife to join me (she is deep into e-mail with our grandchildren and English costume dramas on public television), I bury my face in the side of the pillow, stretch out down to my toes in the hope of forestalling the foot cramps, and *groan loudly three times—"Ooh! Ooh! Ooh-uh!"*—as if the bliss of letting go at the end of the day were agony. At first it may have been an audible signal to the wife to switch off whatever electronic device was keeping her up (I'm deaf enough to be totally flummoxed by the British accents in those costume dramas) and to come join me in bed, but now it has become a ritual I perform for an immaterial, invisible audience—my Maker, my grandfather would have said, with that little thin-lipped smile of his peeping out from under his gray mustache.

As a child I would look at him and wonder how he could stay sane, being so close to his death. But actually, it turns out, Nature drips a little anesthetic into your veins each day that makes you think a day is as good as a year, and a year as long as a lifetime. The routines of living—the tooth-brushing and pill-taking, the flossing and the water glass, the matching of socks and the sorting of the laundry into the proper bureau drawers—wear you down.

I wake each morning with hurting eyeballs and with dread gnawing at my stomach—that blank drop-off at the end of the chute, that scientifically verified emptiness of the atom and the spaces between the stars. Nevertheless, I shave. Athletes and movie actors leave a little bristle now, to intimidate rivals or attract cavewomen, but a man of my generation would sooner go onto the street in his underpants than unshaven. The very hot washcloth, held against the lids for dry eye. The lather, the brush, the razor. The right cheek, then the left, feeling for missed spots along the jaw line, and next the upper lip, the sides and that middle dent called the philtrum, and finally the fussy section, where most cuts occur, between the lower lip and the knob of the chin. My hand is still steady, and the triple blades they make these days last forever.

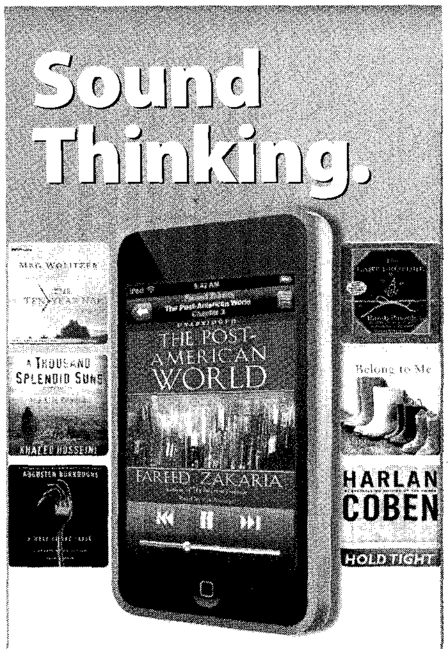
The first time I slept with the woman I was nearly arrested in Passaic with, I purred. That detail had fled my memory for years, but the other day, as I held somebody else's cat on my lap, it came back to me. We were on a scratchy sofa, covered in that off-white Haitian cotton that was once fashionable in suburban décor, and when I had pumped her full of myself—my genetic surrogate, wrapped in protein—I lay on top of her, cooling off. "Listen to this," I said, and laid my cheek against hers, which was still hot, and let her listen to the lightly rattling sound of animal contentment that my throat was producing. I hadn't known I could do it, but I had felt the sound inside, waiting for me to be happy enough to produce it. She heard it. Her eyes, a few inches from mine, flared in astonishment, and she laughed. I had been a dutiful, religious child, but there and then I realized that the haven of true meaning, where life was rounded beyond the need for any further explanation, had been opened up, and I experienced a peace that has never quite left me, clinging to me in shreds.

Years before, before our affair, a group of us young marrieds had been sitting and smoking on a summer porch, and when she, wearing a miniskirt, crossed her legs the flash of the underside of her thigh made my mouth go dry, as sharply dry as if a desert wind had howled in my skull. Human physiology is the demon we can't exorcize. She was to me a marked woman from that moment on.

Until the wife leaves off her electronic entertainments and comes to bed, I have trouble going to sleep. Then, at three o'clock, when there's not a car stirring in town, not even a drunken kid or a sated philanderer hurrying home on rubber tires, I wake and marvel at how motionlessly she sleeps. She has taken to wearing a knotted bandanna to keep her hair from going wild, and the two ends of the knot stick up against the faint window light like little ears on top of her head. Her stillness is touching, as is the girlishly tidy order in which she keeps her dressing room and the kitchen and would keep the entire house if I would let her. I can't fall back into unconsciousness, like a water strider held aloft on the surface tension of her beautiful stillness.

I listen for the first car to stir toward dawn downtown; I wait for her to wake and get out of bed and set the world in motion again. The hours flow forward in sluggish jerks. She says I sleep more than I am aware. But I am certainly aware of when, at last, she stirs: she irritably moves her arms, as if fighting her way out of a dream, and then in the strengthening window light pushes back the covers and exposes for a moment her rucked-up nightie and her torso moving through a diagonal to a sitting position. Her bare feet pad around the bed, and, many mornings, now that I'm retired and nearly eighty, I fall back asleep for another hour. The world is being tended to, I can let go of it, it doesn't need me.

The shaving mirror hangs in front of a window overlooking the sea. The sea is always full, flat as a floor. Or almost: there is a delicate planetary bulge in it, supporting a few shadowy freighters and cruise ships making their motionless way out of Boston Harbor. At night, the horizon springs a rim of lights—more, it seems, every year. Winking airplanes from the corners of the earth descend on a slant, a curved groove in the air, toward the unseen airport in East Boston. My life-prolonging pills cupped in my left hand, I lift the glass, its water sweetened by its brief wait on the marble sink-top. If I can read this strange old guy's mind aright, he's drinking a toast to the visible world, his impending disappearance from it be damned. ♦



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THE CRITICS

BOOKS

AFTER EMPIRE

Chinua Achebe and the great African novel.

BY RUTH FRANKLIN

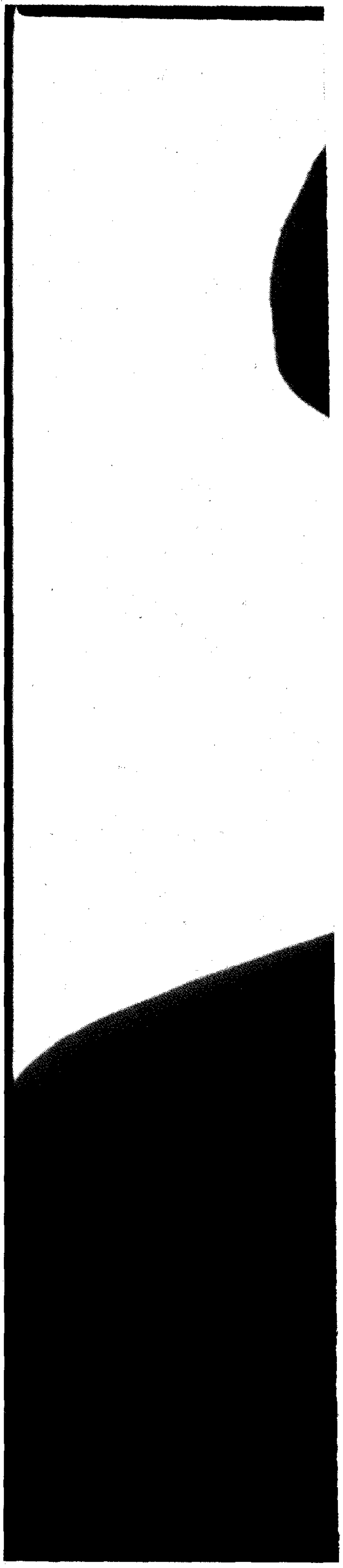
In a myth told by the Igbo people of Nigeria, men once decided to send a messenger to ask Chuku, the supreme god, if the dead could be permitted to come back to life. As their messenger, they chose a dog. But the dog delayed, and a toad, which had been eavesdropping, reached Chuku first. Wanting to punish man, the toad reversed the request, and told Chuku that after death men did not want to return to the world. The god said that he would do as they wished, and when the dog arrived with the true message he refused to change his mind. Thus, men may be born again, but only in a different form.

The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe recounts this myth, which exists in hundreds of versions throughout Africa, in one of his essays. Sometimes, Achebe writes, the messenger is a chameleon, a lizard, or another animal; sometimes the message is altered accidentally rather than maliciously. But the structure remains the same: men ask for immortality and the god is willing to grant it, but something goes wrong and the gift is lost forever. "It is as though the ancestors who made language and knew from what bestiality its use rescued them are saying to us: Beware of interfering with its purpose!" Achebe writes. "For when language is seriously interfered with, when it is disjoined from truth . . . horrors can descend again on mankind."

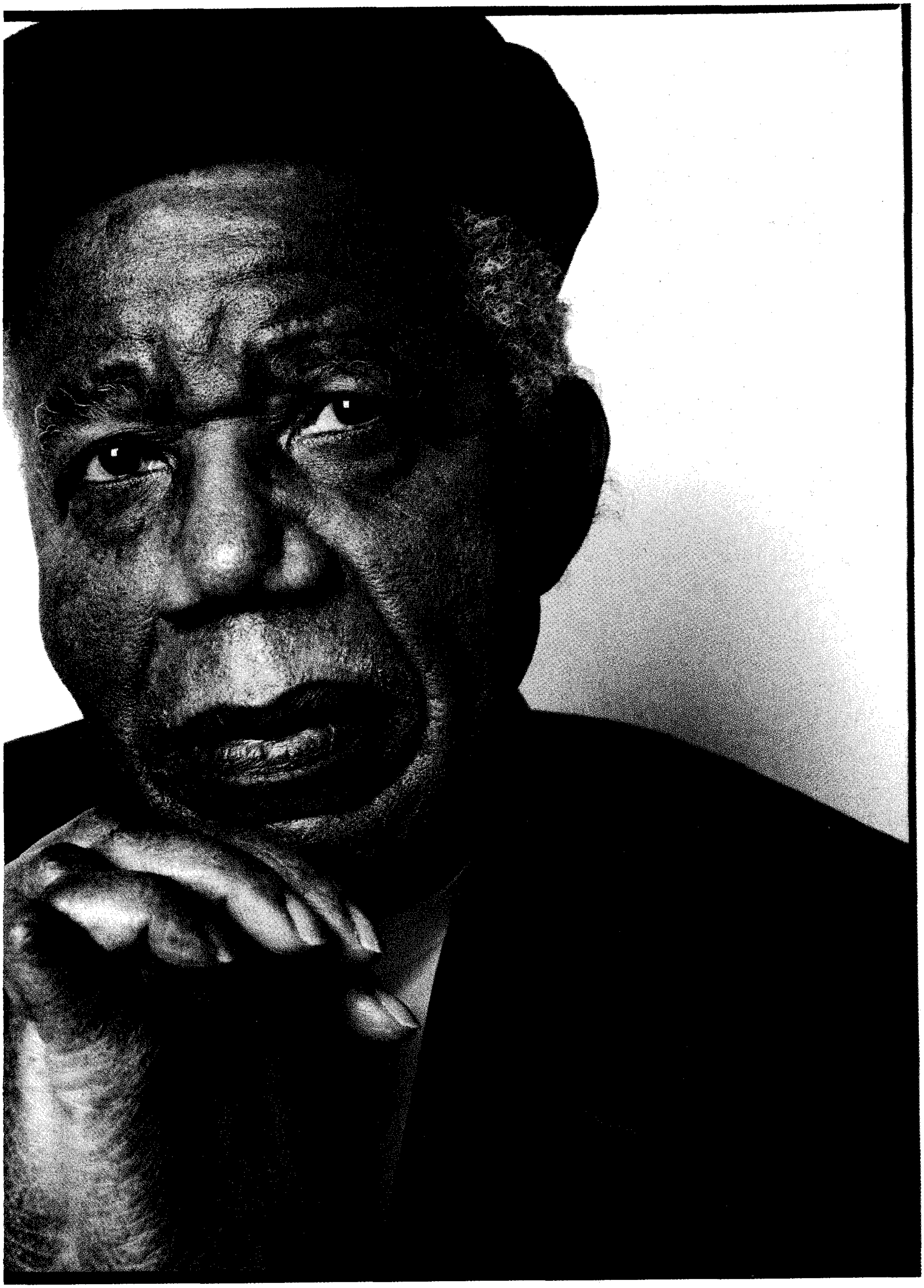
The myth holds another lesson as well—one that has been fundamental to the career of Achebe, who has been called "the patriarch of the African novel." There is danger in relying on someone else to speak for you: you can trust that your message will be communicated accurately only if you speak with your own voice. With his masterpiece, "Things Fall Apart," one of the first works of fiction to present African village life from an African perspective, Achebe began the literary reclamation of his country's history from generations of colonial writers. Published fifty years ago—a new edition has just appeared, from Anchor ($10.95)—it has been translated into fifty languages and has sold more than ten million copies.

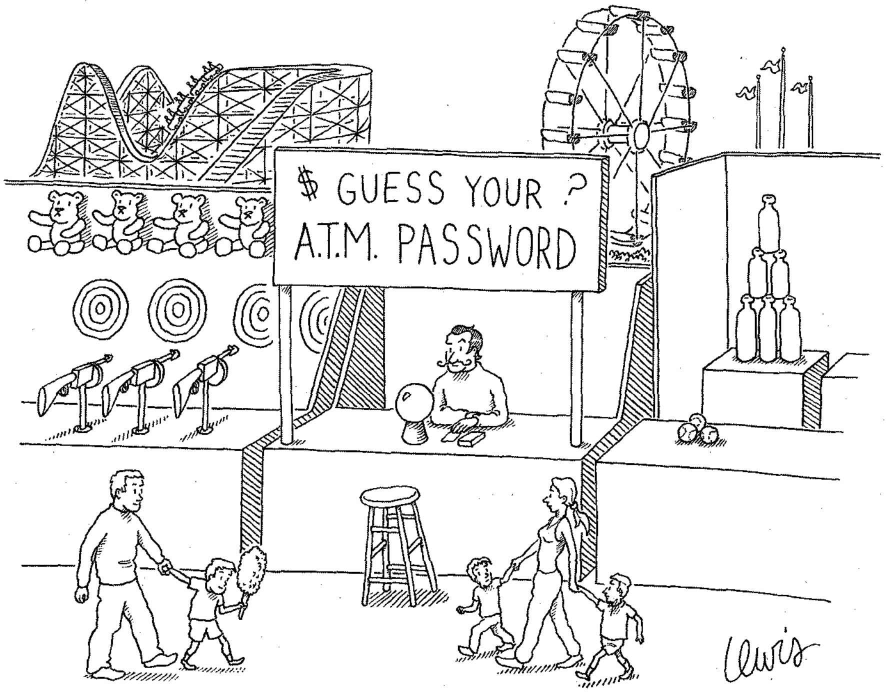
In the course of a writing life that has included five novels, collections of short stories and poetry, and numerous essays and lectures, Achebe has consistently argued for the right of Africans to tell their own story in their own way, and has attacked the representations of European writers. But he also did not reject European influence entirely, choosing to write not in his native Igbo but in English, a language that, as he once said, "history has forced down our throat." In a country with several major languages and more than five hundred smaller ones, establishing a lingua franca was a practical and political necessity. For Achebe, it was also an artis-

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES



Achebe at home in Annandale-on-Hudson. Photograph by Steve Pyke.





tic necessity—a way to give expression to the clash of civilizations that is his enduring theme.

Achebe was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in 1930, in the region of southeastern Nigeria known as Igboland. (He dropped his first name, a "tribute to Victorian England," in college.) Ezenwa-Ohaeto, the author of the first comprehensive biography of Achebe, writes that the young Chinua was raised at a cultural "crossroads": his parents were converts to Christianity, but other relatives practiced the traditional Igbo faith, in which people worship a panoply of gods, and are believed to have their own personal guiding spirit, called a *chi*. Achebe was fascinated by the "heathen" religion of his neighbors. "The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together, like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully," he later observed.

At home, the family spoke Igbo (sometimes also spelled Ibo), but Achebe began to learn English in school at the age of about eight, and he soon won admission to a colonial-run boarding school. Since the students came from different regions, they had to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the language of their colonizers," Achebe writes. There he had his first exposure to colonialist classics such as "Prester John," John Buchan's novel about a British adventurer in South Africa, which contains the famous line "That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility." Achebe, in an essay called "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration," has written, "I did not see myself as an African to begin with. . . . The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts."

At University College, Ibadan, Achebe encountered the novel "Mister Johnson," by the Anglo-Irish writer Joyce Cary, who had spent time as a colonial officer in Nigeria. The book was lauded by *Time* as "the best novel ever written about Africa." But Achebe, as he grew older, no longer identified with the imperialists; he was appalled by Cary's depiction of his homeland and its people. In Cary's portrait, the "jealous savages . . . live like mice or rats in a palace floor"; dancers are "grinning, shrieking, scowling, or with faces which seemed entirely dislocated, senseless and unhuman, like twisted bags of lard."

It was the image of blacks as "unhuman," a standard trope of colonial literature, that Achebe recognized as particularly dangerous. "It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious it could also be true or false, not with the truth or falsehood of a news item but as to its disinterestedness, its intention, its integrity," he wrote later. This belief in fiction's moral power became integral to his vision for African literature.

"Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond." From the first line of "Things Fall Apart"—Achebe's first novel—we are in unfamiliar territory. Who is this Okonkwo whom everybody knows? Where are these nine villages? Achebe began to write "Things Fall Apart" during the mid-fifties, when he moved to Lagos to join the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. In 1958, when he submitted the manuscript to the publisher William Heinemann, no one knew what to make of it. Alan Hill, a director of the firm, recalled the initial reaction: "Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There are no precedents." That was not entirely accurate—the Nigerian writers Amos Tutuola and Cyprian Ekwensi had published novels earlier in the decade. But the novel as an African form was still very young, and "Things Fall Apart" represented a new approach, showing the collision of old and new ways of life to devastating effect.

Set in a fictional group of Igbo villages called Umuofia sometime around the beginning of the twentieth century, "Things Fall Apart" begins with an episodic, almost dreamlike chronicle of village life through the family of Okonkwo. A boy named Ikemefuna has just come from outside Umuofia to live with them, and soon becomes like a brother to Okonkwo's son Nwoye. (Ikemefuna's father had killed a woman from Umuofia, and the villagers agreed to accept a virgin and a young man as compensation.) Over the next three years, the story follows Okonkwo's family through harvest seasons, religious festivals, and domestic disputes. The language is rich with metaphors drawn from the villagers' experience: Ikemefuna "grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life." The dialogue, too, is aphoristic and allusive. "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten," the narrator explains. (As the reader has already seen, palm oil is used to flavor yams, the villagers' staple food.)

Despite the pastoral setting, there is nothing idyllic about this portrayal of village life. If the yam harvest is bad, the villagers go hungry. Babies are not expected to live to adulthood. (Only after the age of six is a child said to have "come to stay.") Some customs are cruel: newborn twins, thought to be inhabited by evil spirits, are "thrown away" in the bush. The Igbo are not presented as a museum exhibit—if their behavior is not always familiar, their emotions are. In a pivotal scene, a group of men, including Okonkwo, lead Ikemefuna out of the village after the local oracle determines that he must be killed. The boy thinks that he is at last returning home, and he worries that his mother will not be there to greet him. To calm himself, he resorts to a childhood game:

> He sang [a song] in his mind, and walked to its beat. If the song ended on his right foot, his mother was alive. If it ended on his left, she was dead. No, not dead, but ill. It ended on the right. She was alive and well. He sang the song again, and it ended on the left. But the second time did not count. The first voice gets to Chukwu, or God's house. That was a favorite saying of children.

Tradition holds the people together, but it also drives them apart. After Nwoye finds out that his father killed Ikemefuna, "something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow." When the first missionaries arrive, those who have suffered most under the village culture are the first to join the church. To Okonkwo's dismay, Nwoye is among them. The missionaries, though ignorant of local customs, are not all bad: one in particular treats the villagers with respect. But others show little interest in their way of life. "Does the white man understand our custom about land?" Okonkwo asks a friend in puzzlement. "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" the other man responds. In the book's final chapter, the colonizer's voice takes over; the silence that surrounds it speaks for itself.

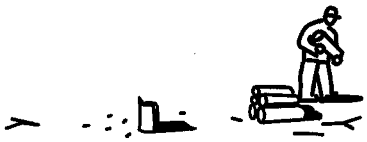
Western reviewers praised Achebe's detailed portrayal of Igbo life, but they said little about the book's literary qualities. The New York *Times* repeatedly misspelled Okonkwo's name and lamented the disappearance of "primitive society." *The Listener* complimented Achebe's "clear and meaty style free of the dandyism often affected by Negro authors." Others were openly hostile. "How would novelist Achebe like to go back to the mindless times of his grandfather instead of holding the modern job he has in broadcasting in Lagos?" the British journalist Honor Tracy asked. Reviewing Achebe's third novel, "Arrow of God" (1964), which forms a thematic trilogy with "Things Fall Apart" and its successor, "No Longer at Ease" (1960), another critic disparaged the book's language as "folk-patter."

This was a grotesque misreading. In a 1965 essay titled "The African Writer and the English Language," Achebe explains that he had no desire to write English in the manner of a native speaker. Rather, an African writer "should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience." To demonstrate, he quotes several lines from "Arrow of God." Ezeulu, the village's chief priest, is curious to find out about the activities of the new missionaries in the village:

> I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.

Achebe then rewrites the passage, preserving its content but stripping its style:

> I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.



By deploying stock English phrases in unfamiliar ways, Achebe expresses his characters' estrangement from that language. The phrases that Ezeulu uses—"be my eyes," "bring home my share"—have no exact equivalents in Achebe's "translation." And how great the gap between "my spirit tells me" and "I have a hunch"! In the same essay, Achebe writes that carrying the full weight of African experience requires "a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings." Or, as he later put it, "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it."

Achebe's views on English were not yet widely accepted. At a conference on African literature held in Uganda in 1962, attended by emerging figures such as the Nigerian poet and playwright Wole Soyinka and the Kenyan novelist James Ngugi, the writers tried and failed to define "African literature," unable to decide whether it should be characterized by the nationalities of the writers or by its subject matter. Afterward, the critic Obi Wali published an article claiming that African literature had come to a "dead end," which could be reopened only when "these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that true African literature must be written in African languages." Ngugi came to agree: he wrote four novels in English, but in the nineteen-seventies he adopted his Gikuyu name of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and vowed to write only in Gikuyu, his native language, viewing English as a means of "spiritual subjugation."

At the conference, Achebe read the manuscript of Ngugi's first novel, "Weep Not, Child," which he recommended to Heinemann for publication. The publisher soon asked him to sign on as general editor of its African Writers Series, a post he held, without pay, for ten years. Among the writers whose novels were published during his tenure were Flora Nwapa, John Munonye, and Ayi Kwei Armah—all of whom became important figures in the emerging African literature. Heinemann's Alan Hill later said that the "fantastic sales" of Achebe's books had supported the series. But the appeal of English was not purely commercial. A great novel, Achebe later argued, "alters the situation in the world." Igbo, Gikuyu, or Fante could not claim a global influence; English could.

Political imperatives were not hypothetical in Nigeria, which, having achieved independence in 1960, entered a prolonged period of upheaval. In 1967, following two coups that had led to genocidal violence against the Igbo, Igboland declared independence as the Republic of Biafra. Achebe himself became a target of the violence: his novel "A Man of the People" (1966), a political satire, had forecast the coup so accurately that some believed him to have been in on the plot. He devoted himself fully to the Biafran cause. For a time, he stopped writing fiction, taking up poetry—"something short, intense, more in keeping with my mood." Achebe travelled to London to promote awareness of the war, and in 1969 he helped write the official declaration of the "Principles of the Biafran Revolution."

But the fledgling nation starved, its roads and ports blockaded by the British-backed Nigerian Army. By the time Biafra was finally forced to surrender, in 1970, the number of Igbo dead was estimated at between one million and three million. At the height of the famine, Conor Cruise O'Brien reported in *The New York Review of Books*, five thousand to six thousand people—"mainly children"—died each day. The sufferers could be recognized by the distinctive signs of protein deficiency, known as kwashiorkor: bloated bellies, pale skin, and reddish hair. Achebe's poem "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" describes a woman's efforts to care for her child:

> She took from their bundle of possessions
> A broken comb and combed
> The rust-colored hair left on his skull
> And then—humming in her eyes—began
> carefully to part it.
> In their former life this was perhaps
> A little daily act of no consequence
> Before his breakfast and school; now
> she did it
> Like putting flowers on a tiny grave.

The heartbreak of Biafra shook the foundations of Nigerian society and led to decades of political turmoil. Achebe took the opportunity to distance himself temporarily, spending part of the early nineteen-seventies teaching in the United States. During these years, as the independence era's potential for brutality became clear, he set out to correct the colonial record with even greater vigor. In essays and lectures, he railed against what he called "colonialist criticism"—the conscious or unconscious dehumanization of African characters, the vision of the African writer as an "unfinished European who with patient guidance will grow up one day," the assumption that economic underdevelopment corresponds to a lack of intellectual sophistication ("Show me a people's plumbing, you say, and I can tell you their art"). He was infuriated to find how widespread these attitudes remained. One student, learning that Achebe taught African literature, remarked casually that "he never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff."

Achebe recounts this anecdote in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' " (1977). Examining Conrad's descriptions of the "savages," Achebe shows that the novel, far from subverting imperialist constructions, falls victim to them. Marlow, the story's narrator, describes the Africans as "not inhuman," and continues, "Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman." And yet the blacks in the novel are nameless and faceless, their language barely more than grunts; they are assumed to be cannibals. The only explanation for this, Achebe concludes, is "obvious racism." Many have responded that Achebe oversimplifies Conrad's narrative: "Heart of Darkness" is a story within a story, told in the highly unreliable voice of Marlow, and the novel is, to say the least, ambivalent about imperialism. The writer Caryl Phillips has asked, "Is it not ridiculous to demand of Conrad that he imagine an African humanity that is totally out of line with both the times in which he was living and the larger purpose of his novel?" But, even if Conrad's methods can be justified, the significance of Achebe's essay was that justification now became necessary: he made the ugliness latent in Conrad's vision impossible to ignore.

In contrast to European modernism, with its embrace of "art for art's sake" (a concept that Achebe, with characteristic bluntness, once called "just another piece of deodorized dog shit"), Achebe has always advocated a socially and politically motivated literature. Since literature was complicit in colonialism, he says, let it also work to exorcise the ghosts of colonialism. "Literature is not a luxury for us. It is a life and death affair because we are fashioning a new man," he declared in a 1980 interview. His most recent novel, "Anthills of the Savannah" (1987), functions clearly in this mold, following a group of friends who serve in the government of the West African country of Kangan, obviously a stand-in for Nigeria. Sam, who took power in a coup, is steering the nation rapidly toward dictatorship. When Chris, the minister of information, refuses to take Sam's side against Ikem, the editor of the government-controlled newspaper, the full wrath of the government turns against both of them. The book does not match the artistic achievement of "Things Fall Apart" or "Arrow of God," but it gets to the heart of the corruption and the idealism of African politics.

Achebe insists that in its form and content the African novel must be an indigenous creation. This stance has led him to criticize other writers whom he regards as insufficiently politically committed, particularly Ayi Kwei Armah, whose novel "The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born" (1968) presents a dire vision of postcolonial Ghana. The novel begins with the image of a man sleeping on a bus with his eyes open. Streets and buildings are caked with garbage, phlegm, and excrement. Beneath the filthy surfaces, structures are rotten to the core. Armah's novel has been acclaimed as a vivid rendering of disillusionment with the country's new politics under Kwame Nkrumah. But Achebe finds Armah's "alienated stance" no better than Joyce Cary's, and particularly objects to Armah's existentialism, which he calls a "foreign metaphor" for the sickness of Ghana. Even worse, Armah has said that he is "not an African writer but just a writer," which Achebe calls "a statement of defeat."

Is it too utopian to imagine that the African novel could exist simply as a novel, absolved of its social and pedagogical mission? Achebe has been fiercely critical of those who search for "universality" in African fiction, arguing that such a standard is never applied to Western fiction. But there is something reductive about Achebe's insistence on defining writers by their ethnicity. To say that a work of literature transcends national boundaries is not to deny its moral or political value.

In 1990, Achebe was paralyzed after a serious car accident. Doctors advised him to come to the United States for treatment, and he has taught at Bard College ever since. "Home and Exile," a short collection of essays, is the only book he has published during this period, though he is said to be at work on a new novel. But, if Achebe is largely retired, another generation of writers has taken up his call for a new African literature, and the majority have followed his lead: they embrace the English language despite its colonial connotations, but they also seek to establish an African literary identity outside the colonial framework. And the achievements of African writers are increasingly recognized: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun," an excruciating and remarkable novel about the Biafran war, won Britain's Orange Prize last year.

The "situation in the world," fifty years after "Things Fall Apart," is not as altered as one might wish. As Binyavanga Wainaina, the founding editor of the Kenyan literary magazine *Kwani?*, demonstrated in a satiric piece called "How to Write About Africa," racist stereotypes are still prevalent: "Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. . . . Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat." But the power of Achebe's legacy cannot be discounted. Adichie has recalled discovering his work at the age of about ten. Until then, she said, "I didn't think it was possible for people like me to be in books." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Bright Shiny Morning, *by James Frey (Harper; $26.95).* Two years after Frey's memoir "A Million Little Pieces" was outed as part fiction, the publicly chastised writer resurfaces with a novel much of which purports to be fact. Set in a Los Angeles populated by miniature-golf moguls, ex-beauty queens, gun-shop owners, debauched child actors, meth dealers, and yoginis in thongs, this gargantuan book is seeded, Melville-like, with chapters cataloguing the city's snarled highways and quirky innovations (e.g., the world's first video graveyard). The characters are relentlessly stock: two lovesick kids from the heartland ("nowhere anywhere everywhere"); a bulimic, closeted movie star with a "MEGAWATT!!!!!" smile; a Mexican-American maid with an abusive employer. Frey strives for incantatory but winds up with banal; when it comes to emotion, the best he can muster is "It's deep, it's true, and it's real real real."

The Gift of Rain, *by Tan Twan Eng (Weinstein; $23.95).* Set in Penang in the years just before and during the Second World War, this début novel explores the consequences of love and duty. Philip Hutton, born to a British father and a Chinese mother, finds himself drawn to a mysterious Japanese diplomat and aikido master, and soon becomes his devoted student. But their friendship—described in romantic, even erotic terms—is called into question when the Japanese invade the island and Philip must decide whether to join the resistance or collaborate with the occupying army. The wartime narrative is gripping, but Eng's story suffers from stilted dialogue, which is often pressed into service for historical exposition, and overwrought fight scenes. More profoundly, the narrative's gestures toward mythology and a philosophy of reincarnation feel like a distraction from the more compelling concerns of loyalty and loss.

The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State, *by Noah Feldman (Princeton; $22.95).* The growing clamor for a return to Sharia law in the Muslim world has often been met with alarm by the West. But Feldman remains coolheaded, placing the movement in a historical context and suggesting that its ideal of "a just legal system, one that administers the law fairly," is an understandable goal in a region dominated by unchecked oligarchies. At its heart, Sharia "aspires to be Law that applies equally to every human, great or small, ruler or ruled," Feldman writes. Of course, he argues, a radical rethinking of the classical model is in order if the system is to be implemented successfully in a contemporary Islamic state, but, if it fails, "the alternative may well be worse." The book is compelling as a theoretical exercise, but its usefulness is restricted by Feldman's failure to confront practical considerations such as the rights of women.

Governess, *by Ruth Brandon (Walker; $25.99).* In nineteenth-century England, girls were most commonly educated by governesses; the system was also a way of absorbing the country's "huge pool of spinsters." (The 1851 census found that thirty per cent of women above the age of twenty were single.) For upper- and middle-class women forced to earn a living, it represented one of the only respectable employments, and often a dreaded inevitability: after succumbing to the profession, in 1820, Claire Clairmont, the cosmopolitan stepsister of Mary Shelley and the mother of Byron's child, wrote in her journal, "Think of thyself as a stranger and traveller on the earth, to whom none of the many affairs of this world belong." This exploration of the lives of six governesses is as entertaining as the contemporary works of fiction such lives inspired ("Jane Eyre" chief among them), and although the bulk of the primary source material is not new, Brandon displays a keen understanding of a complex educational system that kept its subjects ignorant even while purporting to enlighten.

BOOKS

BEYOND A BOUNDARY

In a masterly new novel, two émigrés find a home in post-9/11 New York.

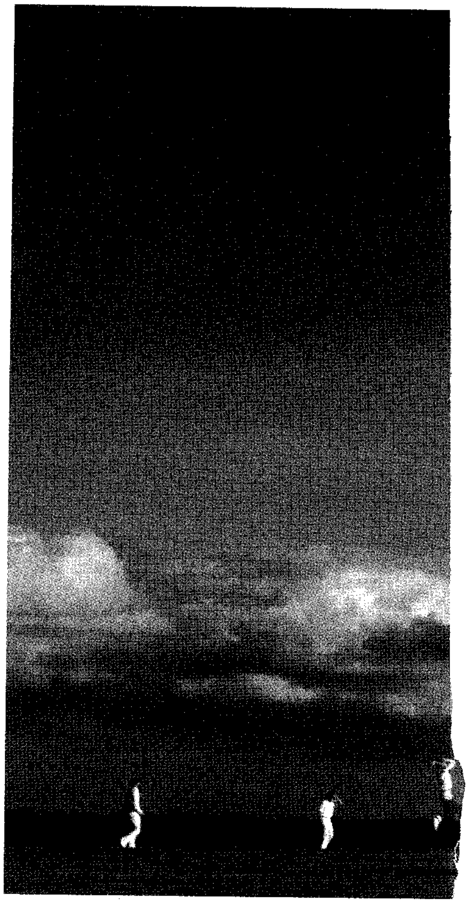
BY JAMES WOOD

Fiction has an entrepreneurial element, akin to the inventor's secret machine, elixir, or formula. Many novelists have had the experience of falling upon the perfect scene or situation or character, the one that will breed meaning and metaphor throughout the book. Gogol surely knew that he had invented a devastating symbolic structure when he came up with the story of a devil figure who travels around Russia buying up the names of dead serfs; he carefully garaged his secret—in a letter, he warned his correspondent not to tell anybody what "Dead Souls" was about. When we read "Herzog," we think: how brilliant and simple, like the best of inventions, to have turned something we all do (writing letters in our heads to people we have never met) into a new way of representing consciousness. And when we read "Midnight's Children" we feel that Salman Rushdie has found a powerful controlling image in the impending midnight of Indian partition, the clock's hands meeting in prayer.

I don't know whether Joseph O'Neill jumped out of his bath in Manhattan shrieking "Eureka!" when he realized that, of all the possible subjects in the world, he *had* to write a novel about playing cricket in New York City, but he should have. Despite cricket's seeming irrelevance to America, the game makes his exquisitely written novel "Netherland" (Pantheon; $23.95) a large fictional achievement, and one of the most remarkable post-colonial books I have ever read. Cricket, like every sport, is an activity and the dream of an activity, badged with random ideals, aspirations, and memories. It popularly evokes long English summers, newly mown grass, the causeless boredom of childhood. Its combat is so temperate that, more explicitly than other sports, it encodes an ethics (as in the reproving British expression "It's not cricket"). But cricket in this novel is much more than these associations: it is an immigrant's imagined community, a game that unites, in a Brooklyn park, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, West Indians, and so on, even as the game's un-Americanness accentuates their singularity. Most poignantly, for one of the characters in the novel cricket is an American dream, or perhaps a dream of America; this man is convinced that, as he claims, cricket is not an immigrant sport at all but "the first modern team sport in America . . . a bona fide American pastime," played in New York since the seventeen-seventies.

The man's name is Chuck Ramkissoon, and we first hear of him as a corpse. It is 2006, and the novel's narrator, a Dutch banker named Hans van den Broek, receives a call in London from a New York *Times* reporter. The remains of Khamraj Ramkissoon—"It's Chuck Ramkissoon," Hans corrects, on the phone—have been found in the Gowanus Canal, and wasn't Hans a business partner of the victim? No, just a friend, Hans says. Later, to his wife, Rachel, Hans describes Chuck as "a cricket guy I used to know. A guy from Brooklyn." We don't realize it yet, but the novel has just unfurled its great theme: this "cricket guy," an Indian from Trinidad, is an American visionary—Chuck, not Khamraj—and cricket is the macula of that mad vision, and "Netherland" has opened where "The Great Gatsby" ends, with its forlorn dreamer dead in the water.

The unhappy news prompts Hans to recall his years in New York, and the first time he met Chuck, on a cricket field in Randolph Walker Park, on Staten Island, in the summer of 2002. Hans and his wife and son had been living in the Chelsea Hotel, their domicile after the September 11th attacks, "staying on in a kind of paralysis even after we'd received permission from the authorities to return to our loft in Tribeca."



In Joseph O'Neill's "Netherland," cricket is at

CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS/MAGNUM

Hans has his own kind of paralysis: large and fair, he is one of nature's flâneurs, willing to be swept along by powerful events and people, curious but happy to turn a blind eye to human imperfection, fastidious but uncensorious. This reflective sluggishness maddens Rachel, who, already on edge after September 11th, announces that she is leaving him and America. Hans drifts, visiting his wife and son in London twice a month, amiably acquainting himself with some of the eccentrics at the Chelsea Hotel, and eventually taking up cricket, the game of his Dutch childhood.

There are moments when Rachel's hostility seems a little undeveloped, and one suspects her absence from New York to be merely the necessary fictional trigger for Hans's hospitable sloth. But, as with "Sentimental Education," one can forgive a lot of stasis when the verbal rewards, page after page, are so very high. As Hans takes the measure of his newfound city, so the prose finds its own perfect calibrations. O'Neill writes elegant, long sentences, formal but not fussy, pricked with lyrically exact meta-

mmigrant's imagined community, an emblem of foreignness, and, most poignantly, a dream of America.

phor. Here Hans recalls the days not long after September 11th, when the city was an acoustic sensorium:

> Around the clock, ambulances sped eastward on West Twenty-third Street with a sobbing escort of police motorcycles. Sometimes I confused the cries of the sirens with my son's nighttime cries. I would leap out of bed and go to his bedroom and helplessly kiss him. . . . Afterward I slipped out onto the balcony and stood there like a sentry. The pallor of the so-called hours of darkness was remarkable. Directly to the north of the hotel, a succession of cross streets glowed as if each held a dawn. The taillights, the coarse blaze of deserted office buildings, the lit storefronts, the orange fuzz of the street lanterns: all this garbage of light had been refined into a radiant atmosphere that rested in a low silver heap over Midtown and introduced to my mind the mad thought that the final twilight was upon New York.

This is attentive, rich prose about New York in crisis that, refreshingly, is not also prose in crisis: it's not overwrought or solipsistic or puerile or sentimental, or otherwise straining to be noticed. A steady hand and a good ear are required to dare the paradox of "all this garbage of light," in which the noticer is both enraptured and faintly alienated, and which accurately tracks the forked European perspective of the novel's narrator. The eye that sees the "orange fuzz" of the street lights is the eye that, elsewhere in the novel, alights on the "molten progress of the news tickers" in Times Square, the "train-infested underpants" of Hans's little boy, "a necklace's gold drool," "the roving black blooms of four-dollar umbrellas," and which sees, in one lovely swipe of a sentence, a sunset like this: "The day, a pink smear above America, had all but disappeared."

Perhaps Joseph O'Neill is the writer this city has been awaiting: born in Ireland, reared in Holland, educated in England, and resident in Manhattan. If his writing has an English ease and classicism, it also has a world-directed curiosity, an interest in marginal lives which might owe something to O'Neill's origins. (His mother is Turkish. His Irish and Turkish grandfathers were separately imprisoned by the British, one in Ireland and one in British Palestine, a history that he related in his involving, spacious memoir, "Blood-Dark Track," which appeared in 2001.) As Hans moves around the city, he sees both natural and human wonders. There is the Hudson, covered with ice:

> Ice was spread out over the breadth of the Hudson like a plot of cloud. The whitest and largest fragments were flat polygons, and surrounding these was a mass of slushy, messy ice, as if the remains of a zillion cocktails had been dumped there. By the bank, where the rotting stumps of an old pier projected like a species of mangrove, the ice was shoddy, papery rubble, and immobile; farther out, floes moved quickly towards the bay.

But there is also Coney Island Avenue:

> That low-slung, scruffily commercial thoroughfare that stands in almost surreal contrast to the tranquil residential blocks it traverses, a shoddily bustling strip of vehicles double-parked in front of gas stations, synagogues, mosques, beauty salons, bank branches, restaurants, funeral homes, auto body shops, supermarkets, assorted small businesses proclaiming provenances from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Ethiopia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Armenia, Ghana, the Jewry, Christendom, Islam: it was on Coney Island Avenue, on a subsequent occasion, that Chuck and I came upon a bunch of South African Jews, in full sectarian regalia, watching televised cricket with a couple of Rastafarians in the front office of a Pakistani-run lumberyard.

It is Chuck Ramkissoon who tutors the narrator in the marvels of this ethnic "miscellany," when he decides to help Hans pass his driving test by appointing the Dutchman his unofficial chauffeur, responsible for insuring that Chuck gets to his various appointments in his 1996 Cadillac, "a patriotic automobile aflutter and aglitter with banners and stickers of the Stars and Stripes and yellow ribbons in support of the troops." Chuck is reminiscent of Dr. Tamkin, in Bellow's "Seize the Day," one of the noisy urban braggers, possibly a charlatan but mysteriously seductive. Unlike Tamkin, Chuck has charm, and Hans succumbed to it in the summer of 2002, when he met him on Staten Island, and heard him talk about how cricket is "a lesson in civility," and how "Benjamin Franklin himself was a cricket man." Like the reader, Hans wants to know more about this dark-skinned Trinidadian, whose family came originally from southern India, and who wants so deeply to make himself an American.

Chuck bristles with enterprises. He has a kosher sushi restaurant, runs a private lottery (it is probably this activity that gets him killed and thrown in the canal), and has designated himself president of what he grandly calls the New York Cricket Club. O'Neill parentally rations our exposure to Chuck, using the novel's temporal intricacy—it moves back and forth between 2001, 2002, 2003, when Hans returns to London, and 2006, when he hears of Chuck's death—to give us suggestive pictures of the man's flamboyance and yearning. The danger with self-exaggerating characters is exaggerated writing, but O'Neill knows how to sign rather than autograph. We get a quick sense of the man—of both his appeal and his type—when Chuck tells Hans that he needs a permanent wife and a permanent mistress: "Anne and me . . . we've known each other since we were babies. She's been with me through thick and thin. . . . So we're together for life. But my theory is, I need two women. . . . One to take care of family and home, one to make me feel alive. It's too much to ask one woman to do both."

Chuck may not have read C. L. R. James's classic cricket memoir "Beyond a Boundary," but he would have agreed with the Trinidadian writer about the sport's affinities with all forms of authentic drama. One day, in January, 2003, Chuck takes Hans to the field he has leased in Brooklyn. This is where his New York Cricket Club will be—at what Chuck names Bald Eagle Field. ("It's got scale. It makes it American.") Hans looks at the frozen, snowy space and is silently skeptical. Now cricket begins to generate its meanings in the novel as easily as lilacs blossom, for O'Neill is alive, as Hans perhaps is not yet, to the larger implications of Chuck's desire. The immigrant is choosing his plot of ground, and calling it his, as the original colonists did with their America. This is where "Netherland" becomes extremely subtle. Hans tells us that when he joined the cricket club in New York he was "the only white man I saw." He plays with people from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and becomes an honorary brown man. But, as a white Dutchman, educated in classics at Leiden and reared in a conservative family in The Hague, Hans is not a "colonial" like his fellow-cricketers but a colonist, part of the history of Dutch imperialism that has marked places as different as Java and America. Chuck talks about how cricket civilizes one; but Hans can talk unself-consciously about how a player is a specialist in "fizzing China-

RAIN

I love all films that start with rain:
rain, braiding a windowpane
or darkening a hung-out dress
or streaming down her upturned face;

one long thundering downpour
right through the empty script and score
before the act, before the blame,
before the lens pulls through the frame

to where the woman sits alone
beside a silent telephone
or the dress lies ruined on the grass
or the girl walks off the overpass,

and all things flow out from that source
along their fatal watercourse.
However bad or overlong
such a film can do no wrong,

so when his native twang shows through
or when the boom dips into view
or when her speech starts to betray
its adaptation from the play,

I think to when we opened cold
on a rain-dark gutter, running gold
with the neon of a drugstore sign,
and I'd read into its blazing line:

forget the ink, the milk, the blood—
all was washed clean with the flood
we rose up from the falling waters
the fallen rain's own sons and daughters

and none of this, none of this matters.

—*Don Paterson*

men” (a Chinaman being an unorthodox left-arm bowl).

Cricket in America puts all this, quite literally, in play. Hans, the white banker, can be only an honorary immigrant, something that O’Neill acknowledges by teasing out the question of Hans’s American driving test. It takes him the entirety of the novel to pass it, and he succeeds only at the moment when he no longer needs a license—weeks before his departure. The sort of document that would be crucial to a Chuck Ramkissoon is a bit of a joke to a Hans van den Broek. O’Neill beautifully counterposes the different origins and expectations of these two men, united by cricket: the upper-class Hans, who can come and go in America on a banker’s whim, and is paralyzed by the expensive torpor of his marital woes, and the modest Trinidadian, dynamic with designs, ever eager to be grounded in America. Chuck is excited by Hans’s Dutchness, and compliments him, in his usual showy way, on being, after the Native Americans, a member of New York’s “first tribe.” This ideological affection arises partly from Chuck’s determination to argue for cricket’s aboriginal status as the first American sport. The immigrants playing cricket in New York are the real Americans, the true natives, at once colonials and the first colonists. The colonials want to be colonists; Hans, the ancestral colonist, wants to be a colonial. In the summer of 2003, he is gripped by “real cricket madness.”

And all this would be abstract if it were not itself grounded by the novel—again, quite literally. Three times O’Neill takes us to Bald Eagle Field. The first time, it is Chuck’s snowy dream. The second time, sixty pages later, it is the summer of 2003, and Hans is astounded: the field is green and tended. “Jesus,” he says to Chuck, “you did it.” The colonial has successfully colonized his green breast of America. A hundred pages later, in 2006, Hans has left the States, is reunited with his wife in London, and has heard the news about Chuck’s demise. He sits at a computer and uses Google Earth to zoom over the old cricket field, and finds that it has browned:

> There’s Chuck’s field. It is brown—the grass has burned—but it is still there. There’s no trace of a batting square. The equipment shed is gone. I’m just seeing a field. I stare at it for a while. I am contending with a variety of reactions, and consequently with a single brush on the touch pad I flee upward into the atmosphere and at once have in my sights the physical planet, submarine wrinkles and all—have the option, if so moved, to go anywhere. From up here, though, a human’s movement is a barely intelligible thing. Where would he move to, and for what? There is no sign of nations, no sense of the work of man. The USA as such is nowhere to be seen.

Reflection on what became of Chuck and his cricket dream causes Hans to recall a recent holiday in India, where he saw a column of poor workers by the side of the road. “They were small and thin and poor and dark-skinned, with thin arms and thin legs. They were men walking in the forest and the darkness.” For some reason, Hans tells us, he keeps on seeing these men. “I do not think of Chuck as one of them, even though, with his very dark skin, he could have been one of them. I think of Chuck as the Chuck I saw. But whenever I see these men I always end up seeing Chuck.”

The simplicity of the writing here and the choosing of a frozen racial emblem echo V. S. Naipaul, that Trinidadian Indian, and, if “Netherland” pays homage to “The Great Gatsby,” it is also in some kind of knowing relationship with “A House for Mr. Biswas.” These are large interlocutors, but “Netherland” has an ideological intricacy, a deep human wisdom, and prose grand enough to dare the comparison. Less desperately than Biswas, less comically, too, Chuck is searching for a house, a home, and so is Hans, adrift in a New York at once fascinating and a little estranging. O’Neill has Naipaul’s gift for creating unforced novelistic connections in a world of forced ideological connections. And he knows perfectly well that when, on the last pages of his novel, he writes about a memory of Manhattan’s skyline and the “extraordinary promise in what we saw” he is hovering, like some novelistic Google Earther, over the sentence grids and prose plateaus of the last page of “The Great Gatsby.” He knows, as some of us had forgotten, that the last page of that novel contains not just a green breast and a blue lawn but an old island that flowered once “for Dutch sailors’ eyes.” ♦

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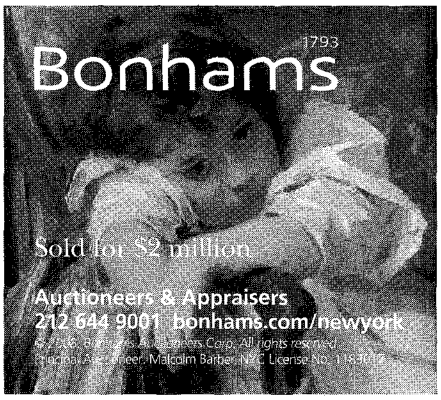
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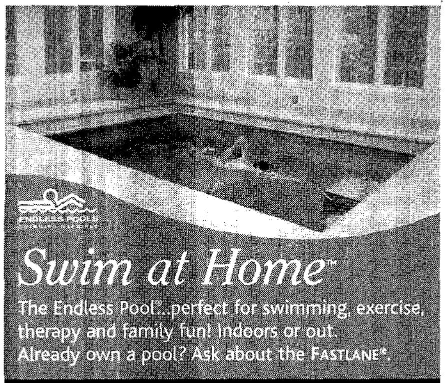

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THE THEATRE

INTRUDER IN THE WINGS

A staging of William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury."

BY HILTON ALS

The evening I saw "The Sound and the Fury (April Seventh, 1928)," the theatre company Elevator Repair Service's rendition of the first section of William Faulkner's 1929 masterpiece (at the New York Theatre Workshop), about a third of the audience left during intermission. I found this oddly gratifying, but not for the reasons that my less than enchanted fellow-theatregoers might imagine. Yes, the show, at two and a half hours, is too long. And, yes, it can, at times, be boring. But how marvellous it is to see that Faulkner's radicalism as an artist—his themes and his experimental techniques, which trounce any persistent belief you may have that the world makes sense and that art should reflect that—can still put people off.

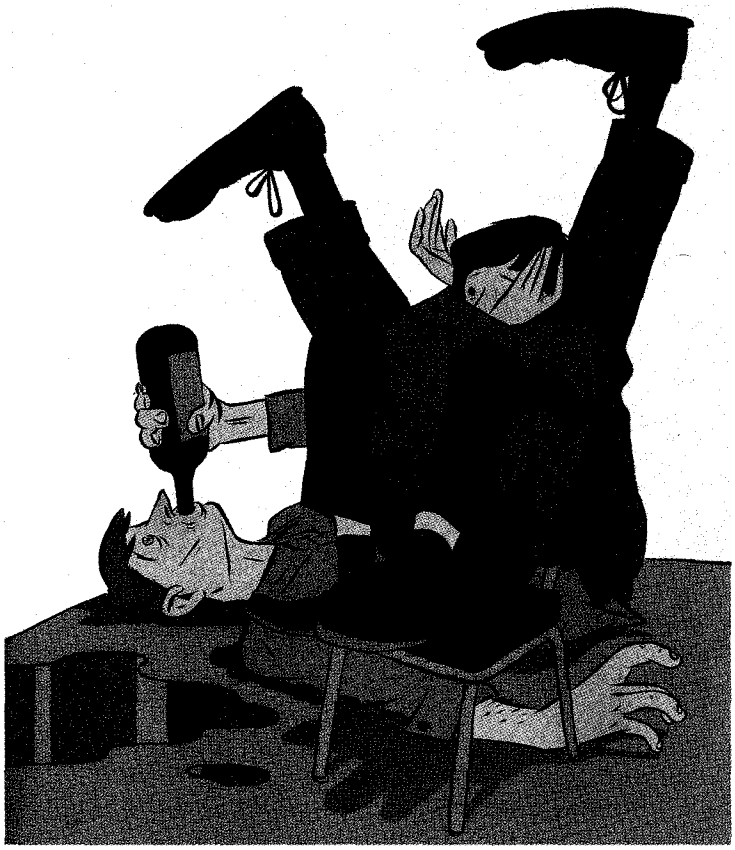
On being told that movies should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, Jean-Luc Godard responded, "But not necessarily in that order." Many of Faulkner's novels and short stories don't even try to follow a chronology. They are attempts at the near-unattainable: reshaping the reader's consciousness. Ambition like that can cause an artist to make plenty of mistakes—part of the curse of genius, it seems, is a propensity for educating oneself in public. And what the Elevator Repair Service production reveals (under the masterly direction of John Collins) is Faulkner's ragged roots as an artist: his love of melodrama, his political weakness on the subject of blacks and segregation, and his conflicted relations with young women, on the page and off.

"The Sound and the Fury," published when Faulkner was thirty-one, newly married, and broke, is a transcendent work about girlhood, race, and a mother's emotional control of her family. Faulkner, as he wrote it, was fully aware that it was the kind of work most writers long to produce: free of editorial constraints, a pure mining of his imagination. In a 1983 memoir, Ben Wasson, an editor who was working with Faulkner on his previous book, "Flags in the Dust" (subsequently titled "Sartoris"), recalled that one day "Bill came to my room as usual. . . . He didn't greet me with his softly spoken 'good morning' but merely tossed a large obviously filled envelope on the bed. 'Read this one, Bud,' he said. 'It's a real son of a bitch.' . . . 'This one's the greatest I'll ever write. Just read it,' he said, and abruptly left." The next morning, Wasson told Faulkner that the novel had left him "emotionally stirred for many hours." He also said that "the sheer technical outrageousness and freshness of the Benjy section made it hard to follow."

Readers are still daunted by the Benjy section—the opening chapter of the book, which is divided into four parts, each told from a different point of view. The first narrator, Benjamin Compson, is a nearly mute, mentally handicapped thirty-three-year-old whose childlike mind flits indiscriminately between the present and the past, thus establishing one of Faulkner's recurring motifs. ("The past is never dead. It's not even past," a character in his 1951 novel, "Requiem for a Nun," notes.) While these chronological shifts are difficult to pull off in writing (initially, Faulkner had hoped that Benjy's thoughts and reminiscences could be published in different-color inks, but in the end he had to settle for italics), the stage is a freer space, at least when it comes to demonstrating the fluidity of time.

Elevator Repair Service, a troupe of about a dozen actors who made a name for themselves, in 2006, with "Gatz," a six-hour staging of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," partly solves the narrative problem by having most of the Compson household—Benjy's two older brothers, Quentin and Jason; his beloved sister, Caddy; his hypochondriac mother; and the stalwart black maid, Dilsey, among others—onstage at once. Most of the roles are played by more than one actor (some by as many as four), an innovation that draws on Faulkner's other great theme: the multiplicity of character in a single being.

Like the book, the show is both redemptive and tacky. The performers don't read every line of the text, but they do read all the dialogue—along with the attributions. ("'Never you mind,' Dilsey said. 'You'll know in the Lawd's own time,'" the actor playing Dilsey says.) In this way, Collins allow us to hear both the rhythms in Faulkner's dialogue and its inherent theatricality. Some of the actors carry the novel around with them and read from it in flat tones, without really making an effort to interact with the other characters. Others try on Southern accents or plaintive voices, but these don't work, and they're not supposed to: for the actors to act perfectly would undo Faulkner's twisted folkiness, the sense that he's re-making the English language with clunky nuts and bolts and splintery planks. The performances are purposefully not seamless. When Greig Sargeant—a shapely black man with a sweet, worried look—plays Dilsey, she is a feeling person whose days are consumed by her efforts to keep the Compsons in line. When Vin Knight—a thin white actor with a sour expression—takes on the role, Dilsey speaks with a parodic black syntax that reminds us of Faulkner's comment that he'd "fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the streets and shooting Negroes."



Vin Knight and Susie Sokol in Elevator Repair Service's new show.

The curtain rises on the Compson home: some well-worn easy chairs, a radio, faded wallpaper, and a sofa. (The beautiful scenic and lighting designs are by David Zinn and Mark Barton, respectively.) Benjy (Susie Sokol), in an oversized wig, sits in a metal chair, center stage, his knees scrunched up to his chest. He appears to be wearing pajamas, while Quentin (Mike Iveson) wears a pullover with a big "H" (for Harvard) emblazoned on the front. Caddy (Kate Scelsa) wears muddy drawers and glasses. Mother (Annie McNamara) wears a white nightgown. The family resembles nothing so much as a bunch of ragpickers—their costumes (by Colleen Werthmann) reflect both their mangy minds and the funky improvisatory feel of the show as a whole. (The project began with the actors sitting around and reading the book, making up the action as they went along.)

April 7, 1928, is a big day in the Compson household: it's Benjy's birthday, an occasion that gives the other members of the family a chance to project their own unbridled narcissism. As Benjy moans, trying to express his pain, his relatives, who can't quiet him and don't know what he wants, talk over one another in an effort to shut him out. The Compsons speak but they don't communicate. They don't connect because they are all blind to the needs of others, utterly taken up by their own internal dramas. Even Caddy, who ran off with a man years earlier, insinuates herself into the scene; in Benjy's mind her presence is as powerful and real today as it was that long-ago Christmas when he was a child and she took him out walking. Sometimes we wonder how Benjy can keep all the details of past and present in his head at once, and then we realize that the Compsons are literally fantastic to one another, and Benjy is the village storyteller, taking in the activities of his people without judgment.

While there is little linear narrative in the book or the show, what Elevator Repair Service makes clear is the story's buildup of emotion. With his inability to editorialize experience, Benjy shows us that Caddy is the center of her brothers' lives and that the various cruelties they inflict on one another while competing for her love are her undoing. Eventually, we watch her creep out the door, like a thief: she is stealing herself for herself. But Benjy can't let her go. Toward the end of the piece, as Benjy sits center stage, Caddy (Tory Vazquez) reads his final thoughts slowly into a microphone: "Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep."

In "The Sound and the Fury," Elevator Repair Service has a great work, if only because its rough-hewn, homemade air is suffused with an innocence that one rarely glimpses in a contemporary work of art. While Collins has clearly been influenced by the Wooster Group's Elizabeth LeCompte (this influence is especially apparent early in the evening, when the piece is broken up by hokey dance numbers), he has managed for the most part to avoid emulating her deconstructionist sophistication. This show runs on something more substantial than chic, more difficult than irony—namely, the real blood and sweat that go into making stories feel realer than reality. ♦

ZOHAR LAZAR

THE ART WORLD

ACTION FIGURES

The fifties in words and paintings.

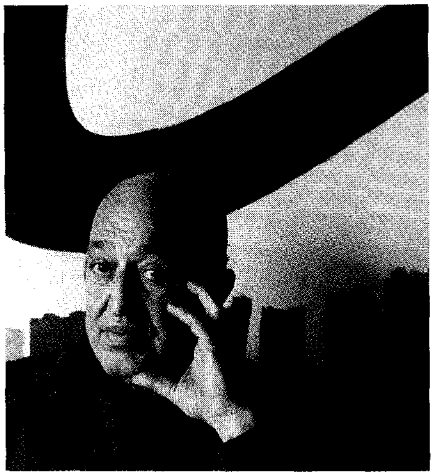
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"Action/Abstraction," at the Jewish Museum, is more a perambulatory essay than an art exhibition, though it incorporates some superb pieces: classic paintings by the rival godheads of Abstract Expressionism, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and fine works by other members of American art's greatest generation (notably Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still), important followers (Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler), and rebellious successors (Jasper Johns, Frank Stella). Arshile Gorky's prophetic "The Liver Is the Cock's Comb" (1944), from the Albright-Knox, in Buffalo, alone is worth the visit. It is a desperately vivacious, songful tumult, seemingly executed with bundled nerve ends. Ragged zones of hot color, like open wounds, interact with drawn plants and body parts that bespeak the artist's lingering debt to Surrealism, all in concert with intuitions of a new, expansive kind of pictorial space. Something epochal is afoot: a dovetailing of raw emotion and disinterested experiment. Those opposing qualities became the magnetic poles of Abstract Expressionism (which was named in 1946 by the *New Yorker* art critic Robert Coates) and also the virtual battle stations of the movement's great, mutually hostile critics, Harold Rosenberg (1906-78), who interpreted the new art in terms of existential drama, and Clement Greenberg (1909-94), who exalted formal invention as an end in itself. Rosenberg gravitated toward de Kooning, Greenberg toward Pollock. They squared off over Newman's smooth expanses of color inflected with vertical bands or lines. To Rosenberg, the paintings represented something spiritual; to Greenberg, they were feats of aesthetic engineering.

The Jewish Museum's chief curator, Norman L. Kleeblatt, has focussed "Action/Abstraction" on the writers, interspersing paintings and sculpture with abundant texts, photographs, and memorabilia. Film clips display the men's rhetorical panache: Greenberg is incisive and imperious, Rosenberg droll and oracular. Both critics, born to Jewish immigrants in New York, were public intellectuals in the heroic mold of *Partisan Review* and other small but scarcely humble organs of cosmopolitan thought. Buoyed by America's ascendancy among nations after the Second World War, they projected the confidence of New York as the new world capital of progressive culture. Each seemed to covet a throne of high-cultural authority which proved, in the end, not to exist. Their quarrels have been outlasted by the art that was their pretext, but comparing the critical and the artistic audacities of the watershed postwar era is such a good idea it's a wonder that no museum has tackled it before. The result suggests, to me, the pleasant conceit of considering Rosenberg and Greenberg themselves as types of Abstract Expressionists: Rosenberg lyrically impulsive, like de Kooning; and Greenberg as starkly decisive as Newman. Both aspired, à la Pollock, to perfect unconventional modes of argument that would knock any would-be antagonist cold.

According to an essay by the art historian Irving Sandler in the show's rewarding catalogue, the New York avant-garde art world of the nineteen-fifties consisted of about two hundred and fifty artists and a couple of dozen critics, curators, dealers, and collectors. Sandler was there, taking notes as a self-described "member of de Kooning's coterie." (Pollock—a truculent loner, living in the Springs, on Long Island, until his accidental death, in 1956—had no corresponding claque, but he was held in general awe.) The hamlet-sized population, concentrated in the blocks northeast of Washington Square, already outnumbered the scene of the previous decade, when all the major styles of Abstract Expressionism coalesced—in a blur of eureka moments, studio by studio—amid poverty and obscurity, irradiated by passion. (For example, Franz Kline, a middling Greenwich Village Expressionist, leaped to a mighty style of frozen gestures in black and white.) As usually happens, the theories that supposedly informed the creative breakthroughs—set forth in Rosenberg's book "The Tradition of the New" (1959) and in Greenberg's "Art and Culture" (1961)—were worked out after the fact. Also predictably, commercial success, popular imagination, and the reactions of new artists wrenched the movement from the critics' shepherding grasp. But the impact of Rosenberg and Greenberg in their heyday was as compelling as that of tribal shamans.

The term "avant-garde" meant something crucial to them. It preserved one essential concept of the Leninism that had intoxicated their generation of intellectuals in the thirties: the vanguard, whose alienated, conspiratorial, happy-few solidarity is an earnest of revolutionary rectitude. Greenberg carried over, as well, the belief in history as a predetermined unfolding, which he transposed from economics to aesthetics. He replaced the bound-for-glory proletariat with the fundamental characteristics of artistic mediums—thus his incessant celebration of "flatness" in painting, which banished the opiates of representational illusion. Rosenberg's polemic was rangier. His Action-painting doctrine—if so nebulous a formulation, which he advanced in a famous essay in 1952, can be called that—enlisted Sartre's existentialism in the cause of exemplary artist-heroes for whom painting had become "an arena in which to act. . . . What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event." He could sure sling the lingo, writing that the Action painter "begins with nothingness. *That is the only thing he copies.* The rest he invents." (Rosenberg was esteemed by Parisian intellectuals, including de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty; Greenberg, contemptuous of recent French art, wasn't.) Rosenberg disdained to clarify how to square an



Clement Greenberg (top), Harold Rosenberg, and (right) Willem de Kooning.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ARNOLD NEWMAN/GETTY; HANS NAMUTH ESTATE/UA; MAURICE BEREZOV/A.E. ARTWORKS

exciting "event" with the residual fact of something that is hung on the wall to be enjoyed. Either you got it or you didn't. But then visual acuity was not his forte. It was Greenberg's, to a fault. When Greenberg looked, everything in the universe except optical fact fell away.

Regarding the social function of art, both critics might be rated militantly apolitical, insisting on the artist's immunity to worldly reckonings. It was an attitude in synch with American ideology during the Cold War. But an irony of their tacit patriotism is that both were disgusted by American culture generally, which Greenberg characterized, in a seminal essay in 1939, as an empire of kitsch, not merely valueless in itself but practically as dangerous to authentic values as Nazi or Soviet tyranny. Rosenberg was more urbane, but he couldn't mention anything in popular culture, even approvingly, without a drizzle of condescension. They were Old World humanists in their bones. In the early sixties, the definitively American triumphs of frolicsome Pop art and puritanical minimalism—the last great modern movements—horrified them. Greenberg lumped them as "novelty art"; Rosenberg decided that "taste has ceased to exist." Rosenberg continued to track the art world, bemusedly but elegantly, in *The New Yorker*. Greenberg—having championed a lackadaisical movement, color-field painting, that was tailored to fit his biases—largely withdrew, though his retrospective prestige as the definer of modernism has never dimmed in academic art history and criticism. Rosenberg has been out of intellectual fashion for so long that his dashing eloquence may come as a glad shock to many.

"I'm gonna ask Harold a question. Am I an Action painter?" de Kooning playfully challenges Rosenberg in a filmed conversation, from 1959, at a table of what appears to be members of de Kooning's coterie. (The critic had named no artists in his 1952 essay, thereby sowing doubt about who was or wasn't an Action painter—in contrast to Greenberg's habit of pegging names up and down, like those of horses on a tout sheet.) Sycophantic laughter is heard. Unruffled, Rosenberg responds with Zen-like indirection, quoting a sarcastic slight to his theory from an anonymous British painter—"Is it possible to paint a slow Action painting?"—and his own squelching riposte: "An Action painting takes the artist's whole life. Do you want to be slower than that?" The audience murmurs appreciatively, though surely aware that de Kooning's question has been evaded. The exchange affords a glimpse of a time in New York when ideas constituted, indeed, a gladiatorial "arena in which to act"—in a sense of individual, spontaneous performance that channelled history in the making. ♦

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Images from "Action/Abstraction."

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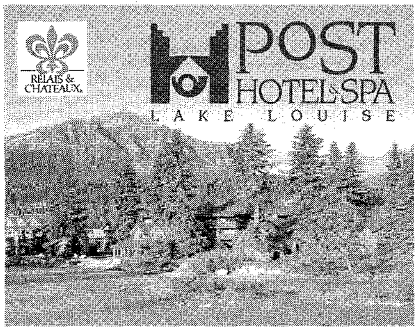

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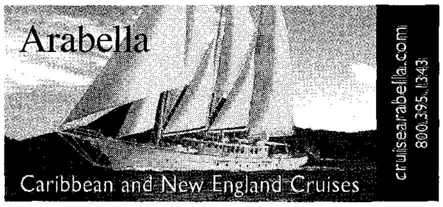

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ON TELEVISION

ANCHOR AWAY

Katie Couric's ill-fated voyage with CBS.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

And so here we are in the latest chapter of the Katie Couric story, though perhaps it can be considered merely a continuation of the chapter that began in September of 2006, when she took over the job of anchor of the "CBS Evening News." After a blip of viewer interest at the beginning of her tenure—though "tenure" is the wrong word to use, if you think of it as a guarantee of a job for life—Couric's broadcast failed to get CBS News out of third place, behind NBC and ABC, and things never got better. Already, about a year ago, the conventional wisdom was that Couric's days were numbered. By April, after the appearance of a piece in the *Wall Street Journal,* headlined "CBS NEWS, KATIE COURIC ARE LIKELY TO PART WAYS," the only remaining question was what that number was. A follow-up piece in the *Times* included assessments of Couric's mood by people who knew her—"miserable," "stoic," "fine," "annoyed at all the stories being leaked about her," "not angry"—and quoted "a senior executive who has been close to the situation" as saying, "She's not a definite lame duck" and "Nothing is decided." Not being a definite lame duck is rather different, ain't it, from definitely not being a lame duck, and, when you hear the deceptively passive words "Nothing is decided," can't you just picture a man in a very nice business suit and an expensive tie sharpening an axe? If you can't, an Associated Press story that ran a week later might do the trick. It began, "CBS Corp. Chairman Leslie Moonves paid a surprise visit to the CBS newsroom Friday to support embattled anchor Katie Couric," and went on, "Moonves told CBS News employees that 'there are no plans for a change—today, tomorrow and into the future.' " If you recognize execuspeak when you hear it, or have ever had that hot, prickly feeling that your own days at a job are numbered, you know that such a hearty endorsement can mean only one thing: Game over.

The following week, Nielsen figures showed that the previous week's "CBS Evening News" had had the worst ratings in the show's history, which is really saying something, as that history covers sixty years; outdoing itself, the broadcast broke its own record the very next week. What's a network to do? What are all the networks to do? These, of course, are not new questions; they're not even newish. The viewership of nightly national news began to decline more than two decades ago, before the Internet and before cable news became a big deal. The erosion that has occurred on all fronts of all the news divisions, beginning in the mid-eighties, when Capital Cities bought ABC and G.E. bought NBC, is well documented, all the more fastidiously because it not only combines business and human interest but also involves media people's favorite subject: media people. Therefore, all eyes are on Couric now, to see whether she'll leave the evening news before the Presidential election, between the election and the Inauguration, or sometime after that. (The agreeable Bob Schieffer, who temped as the CBS anchor after Dan Rather was pushed out, in 2005, and is now seventy-one, recently postponed his retirement, which was supposed to start after the Inauguration.)

I've always been a morning-radio person, not a morning-TV person—I don't want to look at people when I wake up, I don't want advice about keeping children happy during long car trips, I don't want to hear about anybody's dream wedding, and I would rather not know where in the world Matt Lauer is—and so Couric, in her fifteen years as the co-star of "Today," never had a role as a welcome, reliable ray of sunshine in my life, as she did for so many people. But I thought she had a decent chance of succeeding as the anchor at CBS. By some standards, she wasn't qualified for the job (limited hard-news credentials), and, by some standards, she was (smart, mature, an old hand at being on TV). In any case, it turns out that no one knows exactly why anchors are or aren't popular or why they do or don't last. Why, for example, was Dan Rather in the anchor chair for so long, when, for years, his broadcast was consistently in last place in the ratings? And how puzzling must it have been for CBS when Bob Schieffer, a bona-fide old guy, with white hair and a gravelly voice, got ratings that were better than both Rather's and Couric's?

All eyes are on Katie Couric—but for all the wrong reasons.

ROBERT RISKO

It used to be that the person who sat in the anchor chair was hugely important, back when network-news divisions had reputations with deep roots—men who had been correspondents during the Second World War, for instance—and long branches, with decent budgets and well-staffed, well-supported domestic and foreign bureaus, and it was the news division's reputation that set the tone for a network's identity. The evening news continues to have value for millions of people, but millions more are now turning to the Internet. Increasingly, and in more ways than one, there is an end-of-the-day feeling to the nightly-news half hour—there's ad after ad for products that treat all the things that go wrong with your body after you're fifty, and in the broadcast itself there's the endless use of the tired phrase "pain at the pump," for stories on fuel prices, and always, in stories about pharmaceutical companies or warnings about drugs, the same shot of pills moving rapidly along a conveyor belt. But I don't think that people want less news; they want, I believe, the same kind of informed passion and doggedness that TV-news people displayed while covering Hurricane Katrina, and they want anchors to go deep into issues. I would more than happily watch Brian Williams do an hour of news every night (and that's not, I should say, because a member of my family works for NBC News). Who knows, young people might turn on their TVs in droves if news organizations had a few choice strands of Michael Moore's DNA in them, and pointed out when, say, a public official wasn't telling the truth. Jon Stewart is a lightning rod both for people who decry the notion that young people get their news from watching "The Daily Show," and for people who think that his (and Stephen Colbert's "The Colbert Report") is the only current-events show worth watching. I'm not a Stewartite, but when Dick Cheney denies making certain statements about the war in Iraq and Stewart shows three video clips that prove he's lying, I think he's providing a real service to the country, and I'd like to think that that's what his fans are responding to.

Couric's interpretation of the role of anchor led her to repress the qualities that drew people to her in the first place, and she often comes across as hollow and robotic. I'm never as aware that anybody is reading from a teleprompter as I am when I'm watching Couric. She is essentially wasted in this job, as it has been defined by her and by Moonves, but the fact is that anyone with more of a reporting background would probably have been even unhappier in the job than Couric has evidently been, because CBS doesn't appear to be all that interested in maintaining its news division; earlier this year, it was reported that the network was looking into using CNN feeds in order to reduce its news-gathering expenses. It costs CBS seven million dollars a year to run its Baghdad bureau, which does sound like a lot of money—until you realize that Couric makes about fifteen million dollars a year and, last year, Moonves made close to forty million. Couric is far from being the most important part of the story; her time at CBS will be, luckily for her, just a footnote to history, a very expensive Band-Aid that failed to stop the bleeding. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Lewisboro (N.Y.) Ledger.

Sex offense reported at the Cross River Plaza in Cross River. A driver complained to police that a woman was touching herself in a car. Police spoke to the woman, who said that she had just been listening to The Beatles before shopping.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIPS

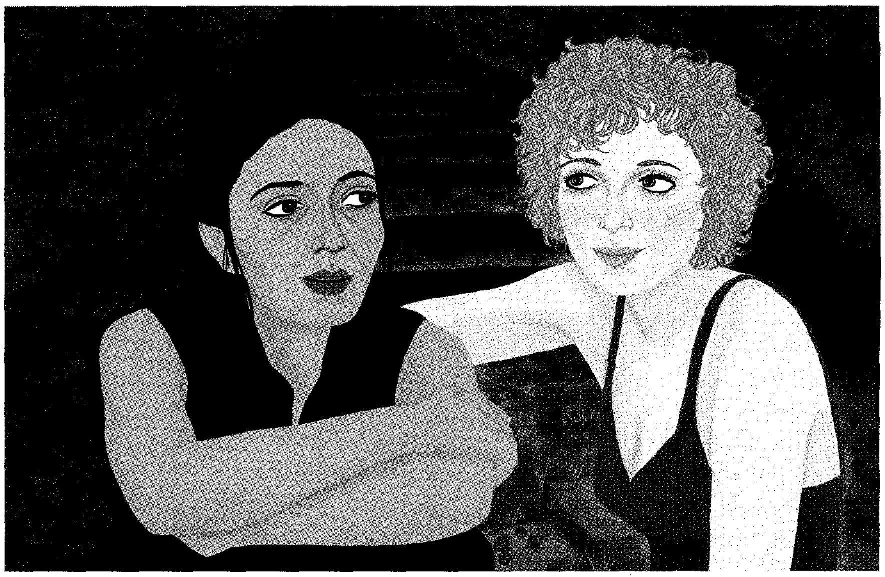
"The Edge of Heaven."

BY ANTHONY LANE

What is it with coincidence? Without it, movies could barely function: of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, Bogart's place *has* to be the one into which Ingrid Bergman walks. His liquorish rant against the odds of her doing so is a clever trick from the writers of "Casablanca": it drains her arrival of silly contrivance and floods it, instead, with a sense of damnable romantic destiny. The big screen is crucial if that trick is to succeed: watch a Fritz Lang thriller like "The Woman at the Window" or "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" on DVD and you find yourself scoffing at the unlikely curves and switches in the plot, whereas the same setups, viewed in the dreamy imprisonment of a movie theatre, feel like the machinery of fate. Every film attracts doubt, but the great ones stretch beyond our reason.

The machinery is at full power for "The Edge of Heaven," written and directed by Fatih Akin. He was born in Germany to Turkish parents in 1973, and his best work delves into those double origins. "Head-On" (2005), one of the few engulfing films of the decade, was a violent love story that ranged from Germany to Turkey, between squalor and serenity, and the new movie crosses the same terrain. We begin as the camera travels across a dusty patch of ground, under a hard sun, to find a mournful man at a gas station. For an instant, we could be in Texas, although, as we later discover, this is northeastern Turkey, near the Black Sea coast, and the man is named Nejat (Baki Davrak). He pays for gas and a sandwich, and asks about the music playing in the store; the attendant says it's by a local singer who died not long ago—"He was young, just like you." Something flickers in Nejat's face, a tiny frown of fear, and stays there for the rest of the film.

Cut to Bremen, in northern Germany, and the suave motions of the camera make way for something choppier. An elderly fellow, with a flat cap and a wicked grin, prowls a street of brightly painted houses, weighing up the whores in the doorways. He picks one, talks to her, pays for her services, and, before we know what's going on, invites her to share his life. In the brothel, she was Jessy (Nursel Köse), resplendent in blond wig, thigh-high boots, and an orange PVC dress; out of her working gear, sitting wearily on a bus, she looks like any other hausfrau, and it takes us a minute to place her. Her real name is Yeter, and the bad news is the title that came onscreen before her story began: "Yeter's Death." Something similar occurs in the movie's second section, "Lotte's Death," and, as with Fritz Lang, we feel not that the game is being given away but that we are due, in the nature of things, for a lousy roll of the dice. Yeter does indeed die, stupidly and clumsily, just as she is getting ready to revive her spirit; for one thing, she had befriended the old man's son—none other than Nejat. That is how things stand in Akin's risky world: people adhere in unpredicted ways, then suddenly peel apart.



Between Turkey and Germany: Nurgül Yeşilçay and Patrycia Ziolkowska.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

We are left to wonder what Nejat was doing at that gas station, and where, exactly, he belongs. Well, he is a shy Turk teaching German literature at a German university ("Who wants to see a rose bloom in the depths of winter?" he asks his students, quoting Goethe), so his loyalties never stay still; the second half of the movie finds him living in Istanbul, but whether that counts as an escape or a refuge is hard to tell. Only once does he seem utterly at home, when he enters a bookshop and smiles with delight, like a child at Christmas: when did you last see a movie that depicted literature as a haven? Nejat goes to Turkey after Yeter's death, to find her daughter, Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay), with whom she had lost touch, but, even as his quest begins, we see Ayten travelling in the opposite direction, to Germany. Hence the accusation of coincidence—of characters wrenched too neatly into place, and symmetries arranged for the director's pleasure. I prefer to think of Akin, however, not as a forger of patterns but as an ironist who understands that bad luck is a crucible, in the heat of which we are tested, burned away, or occasionally transformed. "The Edge of Heaven" is about something more exasperating than crossed paths; it is about paths that almost cross but don't, and the tragedy of the near-miss.

Ayten is a forceful creature. "Maybe you're a person who just likes to fight," someone says, as she recites her woes. Big-boned, full-bosomed, and irate, she lees to Germany because, as a member of a political-resistance movement, she was wanted by the Turkish authorities. The air of volatility in Istanbul is portrayed in a few unforgettable strokes: a riot, a pursuit, and the arrest of Ayten's fellow-rebels. As they are hustled away by antiterrorist police, they yell their names to the neighbors, who spontaneously applaud. I took that to be a show of solidarity with the prisoners but, to judge by Akin's comments in an interview, the opposite may be true—the crowd may be cheering the cops. Whichever way you read the scene, it fumes with passions primed to explode, and what seems extraordinary is that a film packed with perilous appetites should itself feel so un-angry, reaching at the last toward a bewildered calm.

Much of this is due to Hanna Schygulla—a luminary of European cinema in the nineteen-seventies, the muse of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and now returning to majestic form for a young director who is unusually fascinated by age. She plays a German woman named Susanne, living in Hamburg, and does so without vanity; Susanne is graying and stout, a trifle blurred around the edges, and she potters along, flat-shoed, in a sort of dazed shuffle. Mind you, the film gives her much to be dazed about, for she is the mother of Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska), a bright-eyed Samaritan who meets the aimless, homeless Ayten and takes her to her house, and then to her bed. The rose has bloomed. ("You don't even know her," Susanne says. "That's so German, Mama," Lotte replies.) Again, Akin is operating at immense speed, yet the story feels not so much rushed as driven by inevitability; if love is served, you grab it fast, with your fingers, before it is snatched away. That, of course, is what happens: Ayten is denied asylum and deported, Lotte follows her to Istanbul and dies (another dumb demise), Susanne follows Lotte to lay her ghost to rest, and so on, until, like pilgrims, or like the suspects in a murder mystery, all the surviving characters—the dirty old man, the lost son, the wailing woman, and the daughter who craves peace—are drawn into Turkey's embrace.

That is not a political statement on Akin's part, and the new film does not "prefer" Turkey or Germany. True, it finds much to worry at in the spectacle of Turkish unrest, but Susanne's naïve belief that Turkey will resolve its problems simply by joining the European Union is proof that Western liberalism has its limits as well as its good intentions. Again, Akin understands her need for bourgeois quietude, and the German courts and prisons that we see are run with humane decorum, yet beneath this organized decency lies a nagging sense that life is happening elsewhere, at a higher intensity, perhaps on a scruffy street in Istanbul. Akin's movies, like the works of a major novelist, tend to seek out those thorny, intractable areas of private experience where politics is never going to gain more than a crumbling foothold. Although, in the end, the Ayten who repents of her revolutionary past earns a spit in the face from her colleagues, her expression tells not of a woman giving up, or ducking out, but of a soul that has looked love in the face—in her brief idyll with Lotte, and in the gentle forgiveness extended by Susanne—and thus found an even nobler cause.

"The Edge of Heaven" is, in the best sense, mainstream cinema. It dives into the current that sweeps all of us along: fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, anyone leaving home and aching to return. The story, though intricate, is never obscure, and it could be set anywhere—amid the travails of Mexican workers in America, say. "Do you do French?" Jessy is asked near the start. "French, Italian, Greek. I'll do it international for you," she replies, and the director follows her lead. He does it international, and, in comparison with a film like "Babel," with which it shares many details (language barriers, time shifts, multiple locations, plus a storm of suffering triggered by a single weapon), Akin's film doesn't force its characters, as if at gunpoint, to sell us a communal vision of horror. "Babel" aimed at the pit of our stomachs, requiring us to squirm with dread, but this film heads for the heart. When Susanne and Nejat—different ages, different nationalities, but twinned in sadness—go out to dinner in Istanbul, they raise their glasses of clouded raki and drink a toast, "To death." But wait: the camera gazes droolingly, from overhead, at the dishes of food, and then pulls back to show the whole room, humming with ordinary pleasures. Of all the restaurants in all the towns in all the world, they walked into this one. And suddenly you realize, with a delicious shock, that life is coming back. ♦

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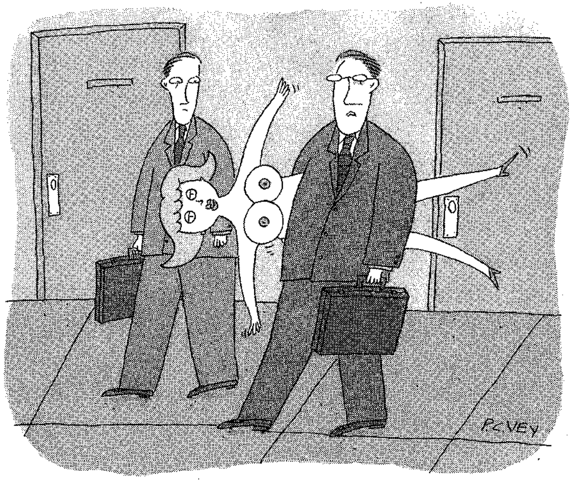
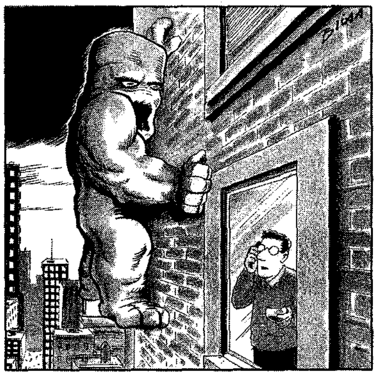
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, May 25th. Finalists in the May 12th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 9th & 16th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Hey, you teach C.P.R. your way, and I'll teach it mine."
Rose Locander, Waukesha, Wis.



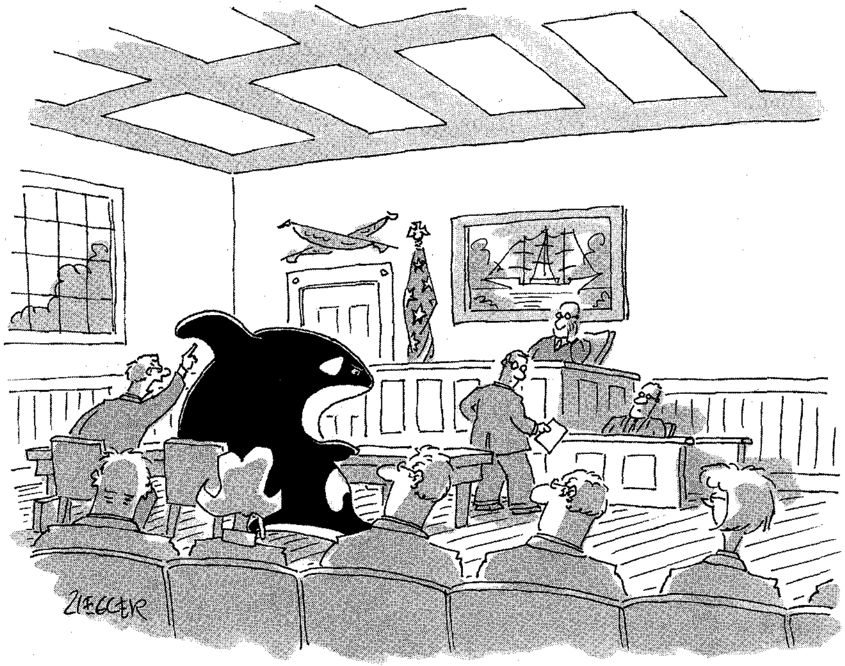
THE FINALISTS

"Better make that a large pizza."
Anne Foster, Seattle, Wash.

"It appears that even the window washers are using steroids."
Jim Malatras, Albany, N.Y.

"O.K. I'm at the window. To the right? Your right or my right?
Patrick House, Palo Alto, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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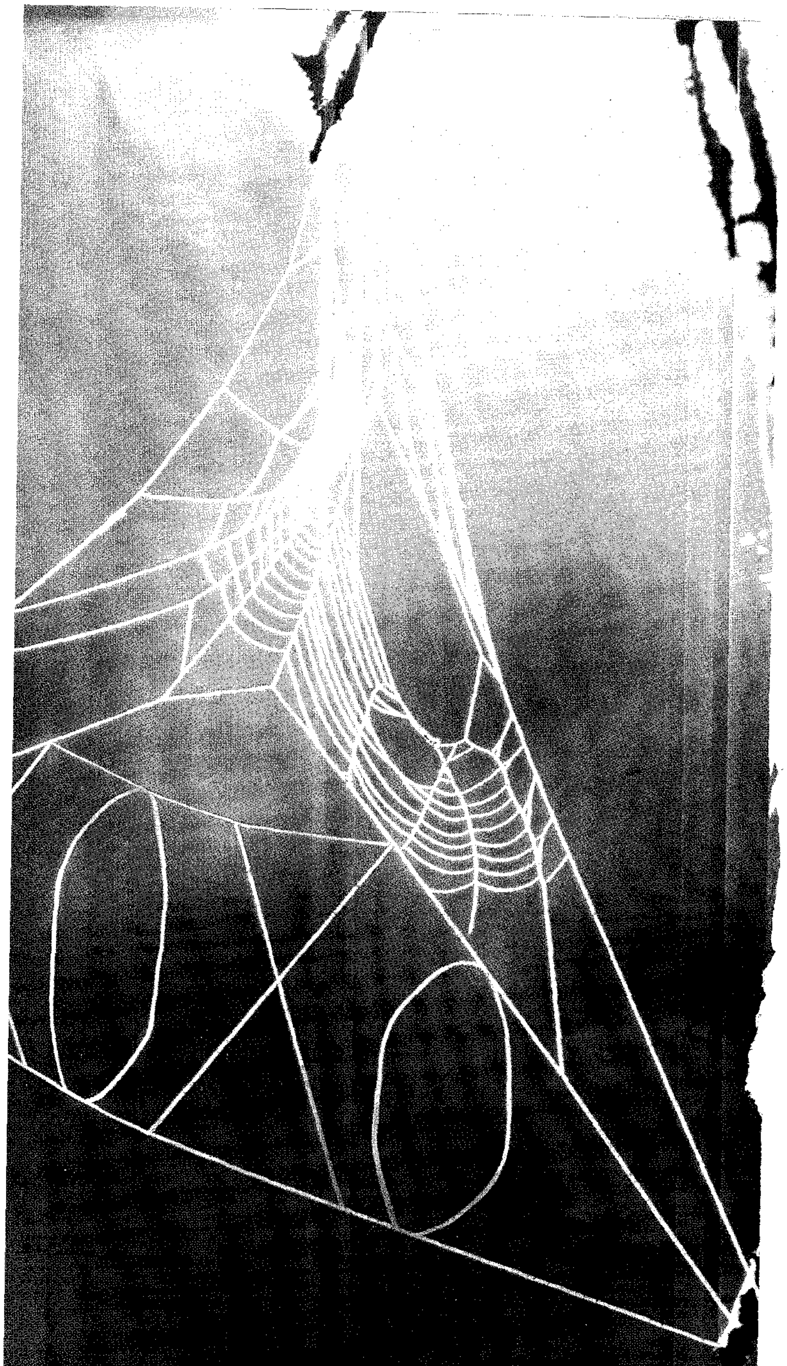

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